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ABSTRACT

Designed for teachers of kindergarten through grade 6, this book contains practical and innovative ideas on fostering literacy generated from discussions with teachers from the United States and Canada, visits to their classrooms, and observations of their interactions with students. The book addresses all levels of learner-centered literacy instruction. It offers creative ways to design a literate environment, orchestrate student interaction, develop fluency, nurture lifelong learners, and assess student growth. All of the activities and strategies in the book are organized by difficulty level--simple things to do, things that take effort, and things for the committed--and include research-based background information, helpful hints and facts, and easy-to-follow instructions. While most of the ideas in the book readily lend themselves to a language arts curriculum, they can all be easily adapted for use across the curriculum. Contains a 28-item resource list. (CR)

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LEARNER-CENTERED LITERACY

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Laura Lipton • Deborah Hubble

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MORE THAN 50 WAYS TO LEARNER-CENTERED LITERACY

by
Laura Lipton
with
Deborah Hubble

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For my daughter, Vanessa, whose wonder and wisdom illuminate my learning in countless ways.—LEL

For my partner, Thomas, who listened to my writing from the outside; and for my newborn, Troy, who listened from within.—DSH

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Introduction

All learners, whether they are teachers or students, must be willing to live their learning in public so that it is a source of demonstration for others.

—Kathy Short and Carolyn Burke

This book contains ideas generated from discussions with teachers from the United States and Canada, visits to their classrooms, and observations of their interactions with students. It is designed for educators making their maiden voyage into the land of learner-centered instruction; those who are actively engaging in exploring; and those longtime residents who are continually seeking to expand their horizons. The book is meant to encourage, support, stimulate, facilitate, provoke, and provide.

The book is divided into five sections, each containing ideas for the following:

- Designing a literate environment
- Orchestrating student interaction
- Developing strategies for fluency
- Nurturing lifelong learners
- Assessing student growth

Each section is divided into three principle parts:

- Simple things to do
- Things that take effort
- Things for the committed

The simple activities and strategies take little preparation and provide a risk-free way of initiating beginning experiences with learner-centered instruction.

The activities and strategies that take a little more effort require additional planning from teachers. Experience with learner-centered instruction is less critical than the level of commitment.

The activities and strategies for the committed require some think time, preparation time, and a readjustment or reprioritization of instructional time. They are for teachers whose classrooms and instruction reflect the principles of learner-centered instruction.

Learner-Centered Instruction: A Philosophy, Not an Instructional Model

A learner-centered *approach* to instruction is an attitude, not a method. It is about the joy of learning together and self-confidently pursuing new discoveries. Learner-centered *instruction* is built on learners' questions, reflections, and experimentations as they engage in meaningful and relevant activities. The learner-centered *curriculum* exists as an outgrowth of those experiences.

In a natural environment, language is used for self-expression, to share and process experiences, and to make sense of the world. Students should be exposed to the purposes of language in the school as well. To support students' developing control over the conventions of language, an environment that encourages and supports risk-taking and experimentation must be established. Opportunities for practicing and integrating new learning are structured, successful attempts are applauded, and temporary failures are constructively examined and integrated.

Learner-centered instruction is the expression of the way in which teachers create learning opportunities for their students and themselves. The ideas in this book are designed to support those endeavors.

Seven Principles of Literacy Development

The activities and strategies explored in this book are based on seven key principles of literacy development. These principles have been extrapolated from current research and practice in reading instruction and cognitive science.

Making Meaning Is Always the Goal of Communication

Simply put, learners construct meaning while reading and listening and express meaning while speaking and writing. Making meaning is always the goal. While this principle seems straightforward, teachers often send conflicting messages to children about reading, writing, listening, and speaking. If making meaning is always the goal, then teaching context and semantic cues becomes more important than "sounding out" a word. Accepting temporary or invented spelling allows freedom of expression without constraining young writers to using only the words they can spell correctly.

Children Learn Language Conventions by Learning Language

We don't learn language by watching it; we learn it by actively using it. The reading process is best learned by using complete forms of written language, not by learning isolated skills. Activities should be structured in purposeful, authentic tasks, and ample opportunities for children to listen, speak, read, and write should be provided. As students engage in these processes, they develop the capacity to solve new problems by using increasingly familiar strategies and cues. They begin to notice new things about words and the conventions of language and to link these discoveries to previously learned information and procedures. These discoveries become reference points for future learning.

A Learner's Experience Is a Key Factor in the Construction of Meaning

Reading is an interaction between the print on a page and the knowledge of the reader. Readers construct meaning during reading by using their prior knowledge and experience. Imagine this newspaper headline: "Vikings Slaughter Dolphins." Most people in the United States would automatically think of a football game. However, for someone who knows nothing about football, the headline might elicit a description of a historical event.

The foundations of children's literacy are in their home environments. Capitalizing on the language experiences children bring to school is critical to their success as learners.

Choice Encourages Commitment to Learning

When students are allowed to choose their learning options, they develop a greater sense of commitment to their own learning, ownership of their work, and a higher level of responsibility. Knowledge of an individual student's needs and interests as well as sound professional judgment guide teachers in providing each student with some choice in their reading and writing activities.

Error Reduction, Not Error Elimination, Is the Aim of Instruction

Learners gain as much from making mistakes as they do from being correct—maybe more! Therefore, it is important to offer an environment in which language is cultivated through experience and experimentation with specific feedback and sound learning strategies.

The Language Arts Are Integrated with Each Other and the Content Areas

Language is never context free. Keeping language whole, and connected to purpose, is the aim of instruction. Literacy includes thinking, reading, writing, speaking, and listening. These cannot be separated into isolated skills in which students are drilled for mastery. Providing contextual experiences that connect children's lives to the world around them is vital. Further, functional communication on relevant topics includes information and interest in content areas. Content area instruction is a fertile place for students' developing literacy.

Assessment Is Learner-Referenced, Providing Direction for Future Learning

Assessment in the learner-centered classroom is formative, developmental, and descriptive. Data about both the product and process of each student is gathered by the teacher through observation, or "kid-watching." This data is interpreted to ascertain each child's growing repertoire of skills and strategies. There is a growth orientation, rather than a remedial one, and teachers look at what a child can do, as well as determine what they cannot do yet.

Creating the Environment: Conditions for Language Learning

A fundamental premise of learner-centered instruction is that language learning is a natural process. It is rare to encounter the parents of a six-month-old baby, for example, who express concern that their child may never learn to speak. They recognize that oral language is a process that develops over time. They intuitively know that, given daily oral interaction, this child will learn to speak—without ever having a worksheet! They respond with delight to all attempts at speech that the child makes; parents never say, "It's not "baba;" it's "blanket." Instead, they praise the child, and provide the appropriate modeling: "You want your blanket? What a clever girl you are to ask for it!" With continuous modeling and feedback, the child's oral language will become more and more sophisticated. Literacy learning follows a similar natural process. Yet, traditional reading programs have dissected the process into a sequence of isolated skills to be mastered before children are expected to be fluent readers and writers.

Learner-centered teachers strive to provide conditions for learning that echo those in which children learn to speak. To create the appropriate environment, the teacher organizes and structures experiences, demonstrates and models the conventions of language, and clarifies complex processes and information. The teacher is a reflective learner and co-learner, a conference partner, a supportive coach.

Brian Cambourne describes seven conditions that should be consciously orchestrated by teachers committed to developing language learning, providing optimal learning experiences, and ensuring student success. This book is designed to provide a plethora of ideas for creating these conditions in the learner-centered classroom.

Condition 1: Immersion

Students need to be surrounded by a wide range of print and print materials. These materials might include labels, lists, charts, books, dictated stories, songs, and displays. Students should have access to print resources and a variety of reading materials, including trade books, magazines, newspapers, and advertising flyers. It is particularly beneficial when the classroom is filled with print that is based on students' shared experiences and relevant to students' needs and interests.

Condition 2: Demonstration

Demonstrations are models of the conventional mechanics and usage of language. Teachers provide demonstrations whenever they write on the board, read aloud, or post messages. Demonstrations provide contextual models that enable learners to experience the conventions of language and language use in print and speech.

Condition 3: Expectation

Learners are influenced, either enabled or limited, by the expectations of those around them, particularly respected adults and their peers. It is critical to convey to students the expectation that they will succeed at their learning tasks. Subtle messages that reading is difficult or complex can be daunting to young learners. Be conscious about conveying positive and high expectations to students.

Condition 4: Responsibility

Developing self-reliant, self-regulating students is a key goal. Learners grow in these areas when they make their own choices and decisions about the when, how, and what of their learning tasks. Build as much choice as possible into their instructional program.

Condition 5: Practice

Rich, diverse, and motivating activities offer students an opportunity to practice their developing control over their language learning. Rather than skill and drill, organize authentic, purposeful tasks in which students must exercise their knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

Condition 6: Approximation

Error reduction, not error avoidance, is the goal of instruction. In fact, students learn a great deal from reflecting on their mistakes and developing strategies for not repeating them. Approximation, or process of trial and error as students strive for excellence, allows students to take risks and work confidently in struggling to meet learning challenges.

Condition 7: Feedback

Learners are encouraged and supported by specific, meaningful feedback that constructively guides them toward improvement. The aim is for learners to recognize areas for change, establish learning goals, and internalize the criteria for excellence.

Overview of the Book

More Than 50 Ways to Literacy in the Classroom is full of practical instructional ideas that can be modified for K–6 use. While many of the ideas lend themselves especially well to a language arts curriculum, the activities and strategies are highly adaptable for use across content areas. After all, in every subject, the focus should be on the learners. Successful implementation of the ideas in this book is very context-dependent. We have included tips throughout the text to spark creativity.

Each section of the book provides activities or strategies designed to fulfill one of five critical components of learner-centered education. Section 1, "Designing a Literate Environment," addresses design, structure, and climate. A literate environment is full of language and activity relevant and meaningful to the students—often in sharp contrast to the sterile surroundings of a traditional classroom.

Section 2, "Orchestrating Student Interaction," provides multiple examples of activities intended to promote collaborative work among students. Resting on current research supporting the social nature of learning, these activities enable learners of all ages to maximize one another's strengths and gain experience in working cooperatively—as the real world demands.

Section 3, "Developing Fluency," includes classroom ideas that promote various thinking skills. Creative and critical thinking can be bolstered in any classroom when students are encouraged to continually make and confirm predictions, are involved in extended reading experiences, and are immersed in integrated thematic instruction. Strategies that support these concepts are found in chapter 3.

Section 4 is titled "Nurturing Lifelong Learners." Perhaps as alarming as our nation's illiteracy rate, is our rate of aliterate people: those persons who can read and write but never choose to do so. Learner-centered education uncovers the joy of learning, so education becomes a lifelong, personal quest—initiated by the learner! Activities in Section 4 have been successful in launching this love for literacy and learning.

The teacher nurtures this lifelong love rather than coaxes students to complete their schoolwork.

Section 5, "Strategies for Assessing Student Growth," focuses on strategies for teachers rather than on activities for the classroom. It offers educators valid alternatives to traditional, standardized assessment. As teachers implement the activities described in Sections 1–4, it quickly becomes apparent that "fill-in-the-bubbles" tests can no longer adequately measure what students know and what they are capable of doing. Learner-centered teachers view assessment and instruction as a virtual cycle: one cannot occur without the other. This final section discusses multiple strategies for implementing assessment techniques that naturally inform future instruction. Individual student achievement is of the highest importance, and this chapter is full of ideas for such measurement.

As a whole, these five sections provide a base for creating a learner-centered classroom. It is our hope that educators will read the text with their own students in mind and adapt the activities and strategies accordingly. We believe that in doing so, educators will transform the school experience for the learners of today and tomorrow.

Section 1

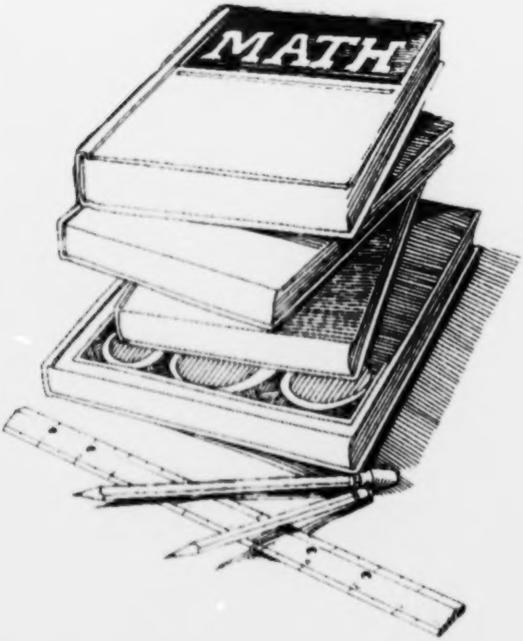
Designing a Literate Environment

> *The classroom should be compatible with the child's natural environment, a place where there is constant language production, beginning with the personal and the expressive, moving outward to explore and expand the boundaries of the environment.*
>
> —Rexford G. Brown

The learner-centered classroom is alive with activity. In it, students' learning capacity is nurtured and developed and they safely risk exploring and discovering. Teachers and students in the learner-centered classroom are co-learners, immersed in the explorations of language and literature.

Visiting a learner-centered classroom may be daunting at first. Imagine a place where everyone is busily pursuing different activities—some in pairs, some individually, some in small groups. This scene may initially appear chaotic; but everyone in this learner-centered classroom is engaged in tasks, purposefully pursuing ideas, information, and learning goals. Some students may be involved in listening activities, perhaps at listening stations with tape recorders or phonographs; some students may be at the "publishing center" developing their written work using computers; some may be working with the teacher, one-on-one or in a small group; some may be developing a project, possibly a play or a poster; and some students may be working individually, reading, writing, or reflecting. The theme of the students' work is usually seen in their artwork, classroom displays, and writing, which surrounds the classroom.

The most important part of creating a literate environment is establishing a well-organized, stimulating, comfortable, and inviting classroom.



Simple
Things
to
Do

Learning Language by Using It

Whole language is a way of thinking, a way of living and learning with children in classrooms.
—Lois Bird

Background

Trish Pollack teaches fourth-grade students at the Dr. Nixon Elementary School in El Paso, Texas. When her students finish a book, they write the title and author on a construction paper cactus flower and staple it to their own cactus streamer. Twenty-six brightly colored streamers covered with flowers are suspended from the classroom ceiling. Students who fill up their four-foot streamers on both sides are honored at a monthly luncheon sponsored by the PTA. The walls of Trish's classroom are filled with students' writing. Large discovery charts across one wall display students' new knowledge about the Arctic. Each sentence frame reads, "I was surprised to discover that ______________________". Each chart holds about thirty interesting pieces of information about the Arctic gleaned from the children's reading and class discussions.

The math corner is filled with manipulatives and other materials, all labeled in Spanish. The directions for activities and behavior guides at that center are printed in Spanish as well. Much of the math lessons are taught completely in Spanish by Trish's bilingual partner—and Trish is learning a second language along with her students.

Two important conditions for literacy learning in the learner-centered classroom are immersion in print and modeling the conventions of language use. Trish Pollack's students see her as a learning model, struggling every day with the challenge of learning something new. Students have the opportunity to develop language literacy by being immersed in print, both in English and in Spanish.

Did You Know?

- Children spend approximately 7,500 hours in a classroom during their elementary years.
- A key characteristic of effective classrooms is the teacher's genuine belief that all children can learn to read.
- Young children are able to express themselves in writing from the very beginning of their school experience.

#1

Simple Things to Do

Labels, Labels, Everywhere

Background

Students must understand that print carries meaning. The same configuration of lines and squiggles conveys the same information each time it appears. Once students understand this concept, they will have the “key” to becoming readers.

Did You Know?

- New words can be taught by labels.
- Labels help learners connect print with objects and reinforce the concept that things have names that can be written down.

Activity

Label everything in your classroom—the closet, the window, the bookshelf, Mrs. Smith's desk, the door, the clock, etc.

Create role cards to label students' functions in cooperative groups, such as recorder, timekeeper, encourager, etc.

Brainstorm adjectives and descriptive phrases with the class and add them to the labels—the *storage* closet, the *dirty* window, the *expanding* bookshelf, the clock *that runs too slow*, etc.

Students can also label events or behaviors with characteristics, which introduces humor, diffuses tension, and reinforces classroom behavioral norms. For example, if two students have a disagreement, the other students might give them the "stubborn" label! Or, on one of those days when you have left something out or neglected to do something, your students might label you "forgetful"!

Materials You Will Need

- 3" × 5" index cards
- Watercolor markers
- Masking tape

#2

Simple Things to Do

Where in the Room Is It?

Background

Visual discrimination is the capacity to see differences between letters, configurations of letter groups, and different words. As students develop the ability to visually discriminate they become more fluent readers. It is important to display print created by the students that illustrates their growing experiences.

Did You Know?

- Reading involves visual patterns—clusters of words, syllables, blends, and letters.
- Children tend to operate on visual patterns in very diverse and personal ways.
- Beginning readers need approximately one hundred exposures to a word before it becomes a "sight word."

Activity

This game calls children's attention to the words around them and develops their visual discrimination. When making labels for various objects in the room, make a smaller set of cards with the same words. Let students pick a card and search the room to find the corresponding label.

Variations

Create bingo cards and have students locate labels and cross out the corresponding words on their cards. Students can also work in small groups using a scavenger hunt format for "Where in the Room Is It?"

Materials You Will Need

- 3" × 5" index cards cut in half
- Watercolor markers

#3

Simple Things to Do

Wordstrings

Background

A clothesline is a simple and inexpensive way to capitalize on unused space in the classroom. Capture students' language on sheets of chart or butcher paper and string across the room or around its perimeter on a clothesline. These developing word lists provide stimulating, descriptive language created by the students' experiences.

Did You Know?

- A classroom rich in language learning has print displayed everywhere.
- Some uncommon spots, such as window shades and furniture, offer space to immerse the class in print.

Activity

Paste an illustration or photograph on the centpl of a large piece of chart or butcher paper and hang it on a chalkboard or easel. Have students list all the words or short phrases that the picture brings to their minds on their own piece of paper. You may want to choose a picture that elicits emotions and/or aesthetic reactions. The complexity of the picture and the student's associations will vary based on their experience level.

Ask students to volunteer to share their words with the class. Write students' words on the chart paper, surrounding the picture, and hang it on the wordstring. Students can use the picture as a story-starter. The displayed vocabulary will enhance their writing. Younger students can use the words to complete sentence frames that can be displayed on other wordstrings.

Materials You Will Need

- Glue
- Photograph or illustration
- Chart or butcher paper
- Writing materials
- Watercolor markers
- Clothesline
- Clothespins

#4

**Simple
Things
to
Do**

String 'Em Up

Background

A clothesline offers space to string up a story for chanting or shared reading, retelling, or discussion about sequence. Clothesline with fabric or large chart paper hung over it can be used to create a temporary divider to section off an area where students create a special project or work on a play. Be sure to have plenty of colorful clothespins on hand!

Did You Know?

- Books, stories, and songs are a constant source of consistent language patterns.
- Children need to hear language patterns repeatedly until they become familiar and predictable.
- Teachers promote the concept of word separation in written language by using printed versions of patterns, which children recognize orally.

Activity

Start with a favorite story. A class-created story works especially well. Reproduce the text from each page onto large chart paper. Be sure to duplicate the original spacing and print layout exactly.

Reread the story with the class.

Give each student, or pairs of students, one page to illustrate. They can use tempera paint or crayons. Talk with the children to be sure their planned illustration represents the meaning in the text.

As a class, organize the entire "book" across the clothesline and discuss sequence. Reread it frequently. Use the story to point out special words, phonetics, or punctuation conventions, such as quotation marks or exclamation points. You will notice the children reading it independently as well.

After a week or so, bind the story together and add it to the class library as a Big Book.

Materials You Will Need

- Favorite class story
- Large chart paper
- Watercolor markers
- Drawing materials
- Clothesline
- Clothespins

#5

**Simple
Things
to
Do**

Hang-Ups

Background

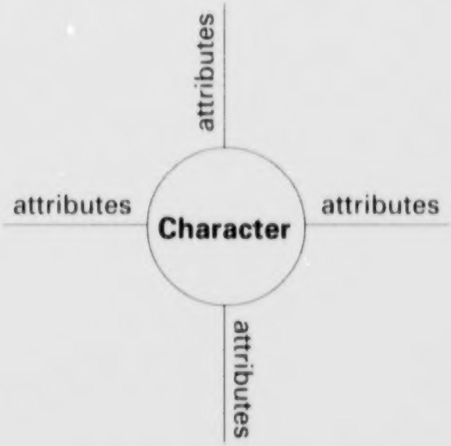
Clothes hangers are useful for displaying language experience charts, poems, directions, and other print that your class has generated. Charts expand as a unit progresses and students have additional ideas or information. Hangers allow previously generated charts to remain visible over the length of an instructional unit or longer.

Did You Know?

- Skirt hangers, especially the stacked ones, work well for storage and display.
- Designing instruction in progressive increments supports learners' abilities to link prior knowledge to new experiences.

Activity

When the class reads a chapbook, create an attribute web for each of the characters as they are introduced. Hang the attribute webs on individual skirt hangers and display them across the ceiling or along a wall. Have students continue to add attributes to the webs as they read. When they finish the book, have the students work individually or together in small groups to create compare-and-contrast matrices using the attribute webs.



Materials You Will Need

- Chapbook
- Clothes hangers, preferably skirt hangers
- Clothesline
- Chart paper
- Watercolor markers

#6

Simple Things to Do

Shoe Bag Classification

Background

Classifying is creating groups of things that are alike in some way, or separating them because they are different. This sorting process is a fundamental thinking skill that students develop by using their expanding experiences and their own language.

Did You Know?

- Classifying is a basic activity for conceptual development.
- Closet shoe bags are an excellent device for categorizing, classifying, and organizing information. Hang them on the back of a door, on the bottom lip of a blackboard, or on a windowsill.

Activity

Initiate a brainstorming session with the students to generate a variety of words and short phrases about a given topic. Print these words and phrases on sturdy cards. Elicit at least one idea from each child. Fifty ideas are a minimum; a hundred or more ideas ensure a rich, diverse, creative experience. Have children generate words and short phrases about the following:

- A topic or theme they are studying
- Reactions to a story or an experience
- Observations from a school walk or a field trip
- A current event

Working in pairs or small groups, ask students to sort the cards according to their own classification. Next, have students place the sorted stacks of cards into the pockets of a shoe bag. Label their categories or have other students guess the classification rule for each stack. Finally, re-sort the cards based on different classifications.

Give students the categories for word sorting in order to teach a specific skill or concept. For instance, ask students to sort words based on structural analysis (like prefixes and suffixes), or based on function (such as animals that live in the woods, on farms, or in the zoo).

Materials You Will Need

- 100 index cards
- Watercolor markers
- Shoe bag

#7

Simple Things to Do

Word Ribbons

Background

Word ribbons immerse students in print. They are long strips of paper on which words are grouped in predetermined categories (initial or final consonant blend, vowel sound diphthongs or digraphs, rhyming families, pluralization, etc.). Word ribbons can be suspended from window shades, door frames, or other infrequently used classroom spaces. They are a quick reference for students looking for a word as well as a launching point for discussion when a child finds a word that fits, or doesn't fit into a category. Word ribbons are a great tool for the ever-growing collection of language in your classroom.

Did You Know?

- Learning to spell is a developmental process—learners go through specific stages as they become proficient spellers.
- Word ribbons support the development of spelling and graphophonic rules.
- Word ribbons provide specific word selections for children as they continue to explore print.

Activity

Initially, word ribbons should be developed with the class during shared reading. After the first read-aloud, reread the story and ask students to find words that fit a particular pattern. For example, words that end in *tion*, or words that begin with *th*. Or they can look for words with the same letter but with different sounds, such as the soft or hard pronunciation of the letter C or G.

List the words on your prepared word ribbons as they are discovered. Post the ribbons so they are visible and accessible to the class to continue adding new examples. Eventually, students will make these discoveries spontaneously during shared reading or during their individual reading time and request that new word ribbons be created.

Materials You Will Need

- Favorite read-aloud story
- Long strips of paper
- Watercolor markers
- Masking tape

#8

Simple Things to Do

Class Mailbox

Background

In the learner-centered classroom students engage in relevant, purposeful reading and writing activities. These activities include mechanisms that encourage students' writing and provide opportunities for meaningful correspondence. As much as possible, students should have an opportunity to choose what they will write and what format they will use. Provide ample time for writing throughout the school day.

Did You Know?

- Purposeful, relevant tasks that engage students in "real-life" activities are highly motivating instructional strategies.
- When students receive a meaningful response to their writing, the feedback enables them to become more skillful communicators.
- The United States Postal Service has developed a program for elementary schools called Wee Deliver.* In this innovative program, members of the postal service assist schools in establishing a school post office, and the entire school gets involved in exchanging mail.

Activity

Setting up class mailboxes offers a purposeful opportunity for students to communicate in writing. You can purchase an inexpensive mailbox at a hardware store and decorate it with a montage of students' drawings, theme-based pictures, or each student's handwritten name.

You can also set up individual message boxes for each student. Ask each student to bring in an empty, round, cardboard oatmeal carton. Discard the box lids and lay each carton on its side. Next, glue the cartons together in a pyramid. (For a class of twenty-one students, begin with a row of six cartons, topped with a row of five, then four, etc.) The result is a "mailbox pod" in which each student has a space where notes can be delivered.

*For more information on Wee Deliver, contact Al Manganello, Postmaster, 2800 Lakeland Hills Blvd., Lakeland, FL 33805-9998, 941-688-5572.

Materials You Will Need

- 1 standard mailbox or 1 round oatmeal carton for each student
- Drawing materials
- Glue

#9

Simple Things to Do

Message Center

Background

The message board, originated by Carolyn Burke of Indiana University, provides an opportunity for interaction through writing and a purposeful way to develop fluency with written language. Students post messages that inform, persuade, commend, remind, or react. The center encourages sharing ideas and demonstrates the functional nature of writing. Information, notes, and communications can be posted at the class message center. Compliments, invitations, advertisements, and reminders can also be placed at the center.

Did You Know?

- The message center facilitates communication among individuals, small groups, and the whole class.
- Students become used to checking the board, anticipating directions and information from the teacher, news of the day from the main office, and personal correspondence from their classmates.

Activity

Create a message center by designating a specific area in the classroom where messages can be posted. Choose wall space or an easel with a pad or board. The center should be inviting, attractive, and organized with the appropriate writing and posting materials to facilitate communication.

Write a special greeting or message to your students. In your message describe the center. Explain what it is and its most appropriate use. For example, discuss and post guidelines for who can use the board, when it can be used, and some of the purposes and logistics of using it (e.g., be sure to include the sender's and receiver's names). Use the center for special announcements, like "It's Joe's birthday today!" or "Don't forget about the field trip on Friday!" or "Who would like to help clean up the desktops this afternoon?"

Materials You Will Need

- Wall space or easel with a large sheet of chart paper
- Watercolor markers
- 3" × 5" index cards, note paper, or sticky notes
- Masking tape or tacks
- Writing materials

#10

Simple Things to Do

Personal Word Banks

Background

Flexibility and choice are important elements in the learner-centered classroom. Rather than create universal spelling lists, encourage your students to keep personal word banks. Students can choose interesting words from shared reading, current events articles, content area lessons, or from something they have heard on television and would like to learn to spell.

Did You Know?

- Students' use word banks to create spelling lists.
- Students use word-bank words as sentence starters or for writing poetry.

Activity

Create word banks by punching holes in index cards and hooking them on a loose-leaf binder ring. They can also be kept in a recipe box, a shoe box, or even a cut-down milk container.

Have students add several words to their word bank each week (the number can depend on the grade level). Students should write each word and illustrate it, use it in a sentence, or both. Provide some time for word bank sharing, either as a whole class, in small groups, or with a partner.

Variations

Once the banks contain a dozen words, have students work with a partner to classify or alphabetize the words. They can also use the words to create silly sentences.

These word bank words become a rich source for vocabulary building. Have students nominate their words with the class voting on words of the week. Ask for nominations and list them on a piece of chart paper or on a section of the blackboard. Have students campaign for their words, or someone else's, by making brief speeches about the merits of the word. After the vocabulary election, list the words of the week on a word ribbon or a visible place in the room. This activity usually leads students to choose intriguing words that are fun to say, complicated to spell, or mysterious in meaning. By creating word banks, the entire class learns many new words that become their own.

Materials You Will Need

- Index cards
- Loose-leaf binders, recipe boxes, shoe boxes, or milk containers

**Things
That
Take
Effort**

Building on Students' Experiences

Background

Understanding print comes from talking and learning about the world and the written language in it. In the classroom, language learning develops in an environment that is filled with print and offers opportunities for students to use language in purposeful ways. Students need to be immersed in a print-rich environment that relates to and stems from their own experiences. Every classroom should be filled with a wide range of literature, including fiction, nonfiction, and poetry, and a variety of reading materials, such as brochures, magazines, pamphlets, catalogs, and newspapers. Atlases, dictionaries, directories, and thesauruses should also be available. This wealth of materials does not exclude basal readers and textbooks, but the purpose for reading materials should be clear and well thought out. Make materials highly accessible, encouraging students to use them.

Bombarded with print in the environment, students see road signs, theater marquees, store fronts, and advertisements emblazoned with product slogans every day. This environmental print provides the impetus for students to plaster the classroom with writing generated from their own experiences. Some effort is involved in planning and providing for these opportunities, but the accessibility of the materials and the high level of task involvement offer a fair trade-off.

Did You Know?

- Children develop four vocabularies: listening, speaking, reading, and writing.
- The average five-year-old enters school with a speaking vocabulary of 2,100 words.
- Once the basic relationships have been taught, the most effective way for children to integrate and extend their knowledge of sound-symbol relationships is through repeated opportunities to read.

45

#11

Things That Take Effort

Mainly Menus

Background

Two key principles of language learning are immersing students in print and providing relevant, meaningful tasks in a real-world context. What better way to connect the two than to collect printed materials from the community and integrate them in the classroom? And the added bonus—you're recycling!

Did You Know?

- Accessibility more than quantity of literacy materials influences literacy development. When paper and books are readily available children use them.
- Familiar experiences and language provide students a foundation for extending language learning.

Activity

Collect a variety of menus—get multiple copies if you can—and use them to do the following:

- Ask students to choose and illustrate a meal, labeling the items.
- Engage students in role-playing with a restaurant scenario. Have them create the setting and write the script.
- Discuss the influence of other cultures on everyday English words. List on chart paper foreign food words that have become part of our lexicon, such as omelet, croissant, or sauerkraut. You can start a word bank of foreign words and phrases that will be added to throughout the year.
- Do a class/school survey. Create a graph—or several types of graphs—of favorite foods.
- Learn about the food pyramid and create well-balanced menus for the week.
- Create a large Venn diagram on a bulletin board. Have students fill in rings comparing one menu to another based on either the physical characteristics of the menu or the content.

Materials You Will Need

- Variety of menus
- Drawing materials
- Writing materials
- Chart paper
- Graph paper
- Watercolor markers

#12

Things That Take Effort

Taking Off with Advertising Flyers

Background

Obtain advertising flyers at local supermarkets and discount stores. Flyers offer relevant, current information and support students' connection between school and home. In fact, a good way to involve parents is to ask them to send in flyers they think are unusual or interesting.

Did You Know?

- Flyers make a good resource for cut-and-paste activities.
- Advertising flyers generate new interests for students.
- Advertising flyers can be used to create activities that integrate math and reading.

Activity

Collect multiple copies of advertising flyers and have them available in the classroom. You can use flyers to do the following:

- Develop students' vocabulary. Ask students to cut out a picture that interests them and create attribute webs with the item glued in the center and words describing it extending from the picture.
- Create a class catalog comprised of students' "wish list" items. Ask each student to contribute an item and tell a story about why they'd like to have it.
- Discuss persuasive language, truth in advertising, and consumer bias. Create a wall chart with examples.

Materials You Will Need

- Variety of advertising flyers
- Scissors
- Glue
- Drawing materials
- Writing materials
- Chart paper
- Watercolor markers

#13

Things That Take Effort

Weekly Words

Background

As students explore literature they can "collect" words that intrigue them to create a word mobile. Suspend the mobile from the ceiling above the students' desks or in another area of the room, school library, or hallway. Once a week, at the designated "mobile time," have students share the words they've chosen. They can also share definitions, the context in which words were found, or why they think the words are interesting. Have students ask questions or make book recommendations at this time. As students complete their mobiles, they fill the classroom with print.

Did You Know?

- Once students discover the patterns of language, they must have an opportunity to use them.
- Enriching students' speaking and writing is a natural outgrowth of repeated, successful experiences with books.

Activity

Have students identify words they find interesting or unusual. Instruct students to use markers or crayons to write their words on one side of precut paper (6" × 2") and their name on another. Save these strips until the class fills their mobile.

Create the mobile in advance and fill it in during the month, one side each week. To construct a square-shaped mobile, do the following:

1. Fold a strip of tagboard (24 ½" × 3") into four six-inch sides. Staple the ends together.
2. Use the extra ½ inch to create two ¼" tabs for stapling.
3. From the center of each side of the mobile, staple a piece of construction paper (12" × 2 ½") for hanging the students' chosen words.
4. Glue the words of the week into each side of the mobile until it's completed.

To hang mobiles, staple one piece of yarn or string to each corner and tie them together at the top. Mobiles can be suspended from the ceiling above each student's desk. Provide a string and hook that stay in the ceiling so the mobiles can be removed and replaced easily.

Materials You Will Need

- Watercolor markers or crayons
- Precut 6" × 2" strips of paper
- 24 ½" × 3" tagboard or oaktag strips
- Stapler
- Construction paper
- Yarn or string
- Hooks
- Glue

#14

Things That Take Effort

The Living Bulletin Board

Background

A living bulletin board is a section of the classroom where a story is illustrated. The board continues to grow as the students' knowledge about a particular topic, concept, or unit develops. This creative display involves the entire class and presents an authentic demonstration of the groups' increasing understanding. Students can also use a living bulletin board to "review" information or jog their memories.

Did You Know?

- As responsibility is nurtured in the classroom, students assume many tasks that were once reserved for the teacher.
- Visual expression of printed material enhances students' understanding and cultivates their imaginations.

Activity

As students begin reading, discussing, and learning about a new topic, they create a scenario, or living bulletin board that is expanded and enhanced as their knowledge and understanding grows. The living bulletin board is a class project; design ideas should come from students. After you explain the nature of the bulletin board and decide on a topic, ask the class to brainstorm some ideas for figures and scenes to get started. Cover an unused bulletin board or wall space with white paper and divide it into several sections or "scenes."

This "organic" display comprises people or characters with dialogue bubbles. Scenes should be labeled and captioned. Have students work in groups to develop layout, create figures and scenes, and make decisions about dialogue and captions. Figures and structures are added and dialogue and captions are modified as the unit progresses.

Materials You Will Need

- Large white sheets of paper
- Drawing materials
- Writing materials
- Tacks, staples
- Scissors

For the Committed

Establishing Learning Centers

Background

A learning center is a designated area in the classroom where materials, supplies, equipment, and often students' work related to a particular content area, skill, or activity are organized. A learning center can be located on a tabletop, a bookshelf, in a corner, or even under a table. Learning centers can be permanent and related to an activity or subject area, such as a publishing center or a math area. Centers can also be flexible and temporary—organized around special interests, themes, or units being studied.

Many learner-centered teachers allow their classes to organize and develop the centers in the beginning weeks of school. Including students in the design of their classroom builds a sense of pride and community and helps develop the "housekeeping" skills necessary to maintain a busy, student-centered classroom. Students should have some choice in developing ground rules for their center-based activities. Choices include which centers to visit, length of visit, and which activities to complete. An agreement can be reached among the students that determines how many and which activities are required during a day, week, or unit; which activities are optional; and which are free choice.

Did You Know?

- Unusual or out-of-the-way places in the classroom are excellent spots for learning centers.
- Familiar and popular reading materials are great for building center activities around.
- Learning centers provide an opportunity for students to develop responsibility and self-reliance.

#15

For the Committed

Learning Center Rules

Background

Learning centers promote student choice and student responsibility. They offer opportunities for self-instruction and provide a stimulating environment in which students exercise and reinforce skills and discover and explore new topics. Inform students about the purposes of learning centers and discuss rules that will ensure its best and most productive use.

Did You Know?

- Clear expectations and consistent routines support children's growing independence.
- Students are more likely to understand and follow rules when they help organize and develop them.

Activity

Develop rules for each learning center and for learning centers in general. Get input from the students about what they think appropriate learning-center behavior should be.

After some discussion, generate a list of rules connected to these behaviors and create charts and other visual displays (drawings, photographs, posters, etc.) Post the rules at each center.

Use print and rebus writing for beginning readers. Reinforce the rules as part of the collaborative classroom.

Materials You Will Need

- Chart or construction paper
- Illustrations
- Drawing materials
- Tape

#16

For the Committed

The Key to Knowledge

Background

Sometimes learning centers are a "free-choice" activity. Other times they are a scheduled part of each student's day. Either way, some method of monitoring traffic—who goes where when, and for how long—must be established.

Did You Know?

- Children are quite self-reliant when they work within a consistent structure.
- Students learn to respect rules that are clearly established and reinforced.

Activity

Color code each learning center to make them easily identifiable. For example, the listening center is red, the writing center is blue. Create a number of tagboard keys in corresponding colors.

For primary students, hang keys on long pieces of yarn—enough for students to wear as necklaces. These are the keys to the various centers. When centers are free choice, students choose a key and enter the center. For scheduled visits, students take the assigned key and do the same. The keys enable you to scan the class to be sure everyone is where they should be.

Limiting the number of keys to a center allows you to control the size of the group. Add or take away keys when centers or center activities change. Hang the keys on hooks or pegs in an accessible spot.

Materials You Will Need

- Tagboard or construction paper
- Yarn
- Hooks or pegs

#17

For the Committed

Housekeeping

Background

Creating cardboard houses that indicate when a student is "in" is one unique way to allow students to track their own attendance. You can make students part of the learning center monitoring routine, free a bit of your time for instructional tasks, and decorate the classroom.

Did You Know?

- Giving students classroom management and record-keeping tasks contributes to their sense of responsibility to and membership in the classroom.
- A child's sense of inclusion in the classroom community is a prerequisite to academic success.

Activity

Construct tagboard houses to represent each learning center. Attach houses to a bulletin board or wall at the front of the classroom for easy access. Divide the area into sections for each learning center. Simple house shapes will do, or create dwellings from a certain geographic region or historical era, a certain novel or story, or the houses of well-known authors. Cut slits in each window of the house to form a pocket. The number of pockets should equal the number of students that can comfortably work at the center simultaneously. Have students create name cards using index cards. They can color one side green and the other side red. Pre-readers can use photos of themselves as well as writing their name on a card. Assign students to a center by placing their name card in the window, green side up. When students have completed their work at the center, they can turn their card to the red side. This will help you keep track of their progress.

Materials You Will Need

- Tagboard
- Watercolor markers and/or crayons
- Index cards
- Photos for pre-readers
- Glue
- Scissors

#18

For the Committed

Introducing the Writing Center

Background

A hallmark of the learner-centered classroom is its writing and publishing center. In these classrooms, writing is going on continuously. The writing center is filled with accessible materials for writing, illustrating, and creating a finished product for "publication." It also contains many models of the conventions of writing, such as enlarged letter forms, samples and rules for punctuation and grammar, and reference resources like dictionaries, thesauruses, books of quotations, and zip code books.

Did You Know?

- It is important for students to see their writing published and shared with others.
- Publishing guidelines should be established so students feel secure with the process and understand that it is achievable.
- Published work should demonstrate high standards.

Activity

Early in the school year, introduce the students to the writing center. Allow them to practice writing while sitting on the floor using clipboards, lap desks, and slates. Show the children how to store these portable surfaces in a large plastic bin or on pegboard hooks for easy retrieval and return. Brainstorm with the students ways to keep the writing materials organized and easy to reach. Model how to use the pencil sharpener and three-hole punch stored in the center.

Have the students select samples of their best writing to be kept in the writing center. These samples can include stories, poems, advertisements, articles, letters, greeting card messages, banners, fact sheets, memos, notes, flyers, and schedules. Students can develop classroom posters illustrating the conventions of language to post near the writing center. Additionally, teacher-made charts with convention examples (i.e., commas in a series) should be available. Encourage the students to display magazines and newspapers on skirt hangers or to sort them into colored bins. As students publish their own writing, add these works to the writing center. More information on writing centers is found in Section 3, "Developing Fluency."

Materials You Will Need

- Clipboards, lap desks, slates
- Large plastic bins or pegboard hooks
- Pencil sharpener
- Three-hole punch
- Writing samples
- Writing materials
- Drawing materials
- Skirt hangers

Section 2

Orchestrating Student Interaction

> *As we come to understand that meaning is socially constructed and context-dependent, we realize that learning must involve collaboration—collaboration between students and teachers, between students and published authors, between writers and readers and among students themselves.*
>
> —Judith Newman

A fundamental assumption about learning, which has emerged from the current research in cognitive science, indicates that learning is the act of constructing knowledge, and that the process of exploration and discovery is often most effectively accomplished when students have the opportunity to build knowledge with others. When students talk with each other, they are encouraged to think out loud, clarify ideas and thoughts, and vocalize new terminology. A related assumption is that human beings produce, share, and transform knowledge singly and in groups.

At Bronxville High School, Bronxville, New York, Bil Johnson's tenth-grade class reads J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* as part of their humanities course. Bil has his students choose a scene from the book they think is particularly representative of the tone and theme of the novel. They then recast it in the present time, changing the character of Holden Caulfield to a female, Holly Caulfield. The students work in quartets and share their work by performing a five-minute enactment of their rewrite for the class.

Bil described one of the groups from last year that he felt really captured the humor and pathos of the novel, the theme of adolescent alienation, and the tone both of the book and of contemporary American society. The students chose the scene depicting Holden at a bar. The text is a stream of consciousness as Holden considers how to approach two women sitting next to him. When he finally asks them for a date, he is rejected. This student quartet's bar scene cast one student as Holly Caulfield, two students as two men at the bar, and the fourth student as the "stream of consciousness." In the wake of the Clarence Thomas hearing, these students, with humor and intelligence, demonstrated adolescent anxiety, sexism, and the potential that someone takes on as the evening progresses.

Knowledge is a cultural artifact that is distributed among members of a group. When knowledge expands in this manner, the knowledge of the group becomes greater than the knowledge of any single member. In Bil Johnson's classroom, engaging and authentic tasks done in small groups allowed the students to make connections, develop concepts, and better understand themselves and their world through the exploration of literature.

**Simple
Things
to
Do**

Buddy Studies: Learning in Pairs

Background

During their formative years, children develop speech patterns and usage conventions based on exposure to the language around them. By participating in conversation, children further develop their understanding of language. Children use the linguistic resources available to them to make meaning of their experiences and build the semantic and syntactic forms through which that meaning is expressed.

Children require partners in order to become proficient at listening and speaking. Establishing a learning environment where children consider each other as resources and recognize that we are smarter together than anyone is alone encourages the social information processing necessary for language learning.

Did You Know?

- Language learning must involve collaboration in the negotiation of meaning.
- Reading, writing, and sharing with others are tools for making discoveries about the world.
- Language and language use is determined by social situations.

#19

Simple Things to Do

Turn to Your Neighbor

Background

Simple configurations can be structured into the classroom to provide opportunities for students to share and discuss information without changing instructional methods. These opportunities provide welcome breaks in the routine. They also allow students to construct personal meaning from new concepts.

Did You Know?

- You can pair students by using proximity (turn to the person on your right, behind you, to the east, etc.) as a simple and quick method to reinforce those concepts.
- Pairs that are configured for quick tasks and changed frequently add variety and multiple perspectives to students' thinking.
- Thinking aloud with someone else promotes clarity in thinking.

Activity

After a shared reading experience, ask students to turn to their neighbor to discuss new information. Younger students can use paper and pencil to jot down their partners' thoughts. Some possibilities include having students do the following:

- Explain or clarify a particular passage or event.
- Generate several adjectives for one of the characters.
- Discuss the author's use of setting, plot, theme.
- Discuss any information you feel is appropriate.

Tell the class that you will select several students to share their partners' ideas. In this way, students are accountable to each other and to you for providing some information. With consistent use, students become familiar with this "think/pair/share" structure and it is rarely necessary to reinforce the appropriate behaviors.

Materials You Will Need

- Read-aloud literature
- Writing materials

#20

Simple Things to Do

Paired Verbal Fluency

Background

Constructing language and listening to the ideas of others prepares students for further instruction by stimulating thinking. It also increases students' pre-instruction knowledge base and clarifies any misconceptions they may be bringing to the lesson.

Did You Know?

- Paired Verbal Fluency (PVF) activates students' prior knowledge and experience before holding a class discussion.
- PVF is a great prewriting activity.

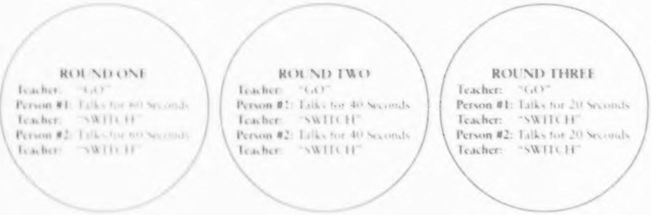
Activity

Choose partners and have each pair decide who will be person #1 and person #2. Students will alternate speaking in three rounds of various lengths.

During the discussion, partners must listen carefully to each other without interruptions. They are not allowed to repeat anything they or their partner have already said. Students should rely on their memory instead of using their notes.

At your signal, student #1 begins. After the selected time elapses, student #2 takes over. The rounds go as follows:

Paired Verbal Fluency



ROUND ONE
Teacher: "GO"
Person #1: Talks for 60 Seconds
Teacher: "SWITCH"
Person #2: Talks for 60 Seconds
Teacher: "SWITCH"

ROUND TWO
Teacher: "GO"
Person #1: Talks for 40 Seconds
Teacher: "SWITCH"
Person #2: Talks for 40 Seconds
Teacher: "SWITCH"

ROUND THREE
Teacher: "GO"
Person #1: Talks for 20 Seconds
Teacher: "SWITCH"
Person #2: Talks for 20 Seconds
Teacher: "SWITCH"

Adjust the length of each round to suit the dynamics of the class, grade level appropriateness, and content being discussed.

Finally, in a large group, students record their ideas and information on chart paper for sharing and discussing. They can save ideas for later use, as well.

Paired Verbal Fluency is also a good closure activity. After students have listened to a story, taken a field trip, or participated in a lesson, ask them to do a PVF.

Materials You Will Need

- Chart paper
- Watercolor markers

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#21

Simple Things to Do

Learning Partners

Background

Establishing learning partners among your students is an effective way to build trust, partner students for paired activities, and build listening, social, and metacognitive skills. Have students choose their learning partners or randomly or strategically assign partners based on ability, social skill, or gender. Direct learning partners to choose a specific spot in the room where they will meet whenever a learning partner activity is announced. Learning partners can be paired for any of the partner activities in this book.

Did You Know?

- You can line students up by birthdays (or other criteria) and count off pairs to select learning partners.
- You can give students cards with authors and titles and have them find their match.
- You can form pairs by allowing students to mill about. Call "stop" and direct them to face the person closest to them.

Activity

Use learning partners to promote student thinking. Ask your students to meet with their partners to do the following:

- Make predictions about a story or book they are about to hear or read.
- Think about reactions to a shared reading, a current event, a hypothesis, etc.
- Respond to a metacognitive stem written either on the chalkboard, an overhead transparency, or on paper for each student. Some examples include:

  The most significant thing I learned about was . . . ;

  I want to be sure to remember . . . ;

  Something I would do differently next time would be . . .

Materials You Will Need

- Various forms of literature and reading materials
- Chalkboard or overhead transparency
- Writing materials

#22

**Simple
Things
to
Do**

Learning Partner Biographies

Background

In learner-centered classrooms, each student is a learner and a teacher. Giving students an opportunity to learn about each other helps them learn about other cultures, explore different family lifestyles, and consider new hobbies and interests. This experience also begins an important first step in understanding and being understood by others.

Did You Know?

- Students need to see themselves as individuals, a larger social and cultural group, and a classroom community.
- Students approach literature from both a personal and cultural perspective. Developing their appreciation for diverse cultures increases their capacity to understand a variety of literature.

Activity

Writing learning partner biographies allows partners to get acquainted. This activity is a twist on the more traditional assignment of writing an autobiography at the beginning of the year. Students create (or are given) interview questions to ask their partners. Based on their interviews, students write about their partner's life or some aspect of it. Younger students can illustrate an important time in their partner's life or some of their partner's favorite things.

Materials You Will Need

- Interview questions
- Writing materials
- Drawing materials

#23

Simple Things to Do

Summary Pairs

Background

When we respond to information we gather from reading, we are more likely to apply, extend, and simplify that information. Responses to reading can be writing, creative dramatics, drawing, or in this case, verbal summaries of what was just read.

Did You Know?

- Students may pay too little attention to the text if they only read silently.
- Summarizing a piece of reading gives students an opportunity to evaluate the piece, consider the author's intention, and make connections to their own experiences.

Activity

Have learning partners alternate reading aloud and summarizing paragraphs (or any other predetermined section). Students can choose the length of the passage they will read; however, pairs need to agree.

One student reads aloud and then summarizes what has just been read. The second student adds anything that was left out, emphasizes key points, or even offers comments about the content.

Both students must agree on the significant points before continuing. The process is repeated with the second student reading aloud. Partners alternate in this manner until the selection is completed.

Materials You Will Need

- Various literature or subject area text for oral reading

#24

Simple Things to Do

The King and Queen of Questions

Background

The King and Queen of questions are selected students who consult with other students needing assistance. In this way, students don't stay "stuck"; they recognize each other as resources and realize that the adults in the room are not the only sources of knowledge, information, or answers.

Did You Know?

- Children must believe that they are making a contribution and that their thoughts are worthwhile.
- All students develop self-reliance and problem-solving skills when a classroom incorporates a King and Queen of Questions.

Activity

Familiarize students with the King and Queen of Questions in your classroom as early in the school year as possible. Explain to the students that the King and Queen serve as leaders in problem solving; they are not expected to generate answers or know the solutions. Their task is to suggest problem-solving strategies. They might brainstorm possibilities, generate alternatives, or offer possible resources.

The role of the King and Queen rotates among class members (daily, weekly, or in time frames you deem appropriate). The monarchs are not chosen based on academic ability. An equitable rotation system should be established so everyone is aware they will have a turn. Consider organizing pairs with different strengths and abilities to enrich everyone's learning opportunities.

Every student should have an opportunity to be King or Queen because every student has the capacity to be thoughtful and strategic. However, you might want to begin with students who have strong social and problem-solving skills to present an appropriate model and establish high expectations.

Things That Take Effort

Structuring Small Groups

Background

Working cooperatively in small groups offers great benefits to students. Students are more likely to be successful at a wider variety of learning tasks; they increase their problem-solving and decision-making capacities by sharing strategies with others; they are more articulate and clearer in their verbal expression as well as their thinking; and they increase their positive feelings about themselves and school in general. However, to reap these benefits, small-group work must be highly structured, and group processes must be taught and reinforced. Using the acronym BUILD, Bellanca and Fogarty (1991) offer five elements that must be included in cooperatively structured group work: build in higher-order thinking; unite teams; insure individual learning; look over and discuss; and develop social skills.

By incorporating the elements of BUILD, you can ensure that your students will benefit from their cooperative experiences, as well as develop the social skills necessary for success in life.

Did You Know?

- Working creatively and cooperatively as a team member are the skills of the future.
- Cooperative experiences promote self-esteem and a positive attitude toward school, as well as academic success.
- Cooperative experiences enhance long- and short-term memory as well as critical-thinking skills.

#25

Things That Take Effort

Story Map Trios

Background

As students read various genres of literature, they begin to understand that different types of written work follow specific maps. For example, a typical plot profile for a short story would have a beginning problem (or problems), a series of scenes leading toward a resolution, a climactic event (or denouement), and then an ending. Students should become familiar with these story maps in order to become fluent readers and better writers.

Did You Know?

- Students will not be good writers if they are not proficient readers.
- Reciprocal skills between reading and writing include understanding purpose, recognizing audience, and knowing the conventions of language.

Activity

During this activity, students read material aloud together or read silently to themselves. Then, in groups of three, students develop a story map on paper and identify key elements of the plot. Assign the following roles to group members:

The Cartographer—The cartographer captures the group's thinking and records it on the story map. If the group decides to brainstorm a number of possibilities, the cartographer should record these. However, the cartographer must wait to be sure everyone agrees before filling in the story map.

The Navigator—The navigator makes sure that all members understand, agree, and are comfortable with the group's decisions. The navigator guides the group work, steering its efforts through any problems and making sure everyone is included and contributing to the group's efforts.

The Explorer—The explorer works to extend the group's thinking by exploring all avenues of thought. The explorer might ask questions like, "Are there any other important events we haven't considered?" or "What other possibilities are there?" or "Where can we look for more ideas?"

Materials You Will Need

- Short stories
- Writing materials

#26

Things
That
Take
Effort

Get the Point

Background

When consensus is the goal, students must engage in dialogue and generate a plan, a statement, a conclusion, or ideas with which they all agree. This process aids students in clarifying and articulating their own points of view, developing active listening skills, building effective group process skills, and broadening individual perspectives.

Did You Know?

- Consensus building is an important activity for learning to use conflict constructively.
- Consensus building requires students to articulate individual points of view and listen with empathy.

Activity

After reading aloud a chapter from a book, students individually write down what they think are the most important points of the passage. Working in groups of three, students each have one minute to present their points. The group must agree on and be prepared to share at least three significant points from the selection. They must be ready to justify their choices based on the story. A facilitator, who ensures the group's completion of the task in a timely manner, an arbitrator, who checks for understanding and agreement, and a secretary, who records the group's work, help to structure group productivity. When it's time to share, a reporter for each group should be chosen randomly to ensure that all members contributed and understand and share the group's thinking.

Extend this activity by bringing the whole class together to create a class list of the most significant events in the chapter. List the events on large chart paper. Have students add to the list as they read subsequent chapters. Use the list as the basis for a discussion of theme, tone, author's purpose, etc.

Materials You Will Need

- Reading material
- Writing material
- Large chart paper
- Watercolor markers

#27

Things That Take Effort

Peer Editing: Learning Together

Background

Students need to assess a piece of writing based on both internal (their own) and external (established standards) criteria for quality. Students develop and exercise this ability by assessing their writing and the writing of others. Have the class develop the criteria for a quality piece of written work by generating a list of characteristics of good writing. Have them work in small groups to apply these criteria to samples of published works. Ask students to substantiate their evaluations with specific references to the work. Then have them apply these criteria to samples of students' work from previous years, other classes, or other grade levels. Ask the groups to apply the criteria to samples from their own class.

Did You Know?

- Effective peer editing is facilitated by clearly defined ground rules.
- The peer editing process develops students' academic and social skills.

Activity

First, establish editing partners. If working in pairs is new to the class, do some trust-building activities. When students begin this process, focus their attention on a particular purpose for each editing session. During one session, students might look for clear transitions between sections and the use of details to support main ideas. In the next session, they may look for mechanics and word usage. Be sure to establish operating ground rules for editing partners. Some suggestions:

- Base your feedback on the agreed-upon criteria. Be as specific as possible.
- Monitor time and use it wisely. Take turns so students have time to consider their work and offer support to their partners.
- Be an active listener. Paraphrase and clarify responses to communicate your interest and understanding.

Materials You Will Need

- Writing samples or students' work
- Colored pens or pencils for editing

#28

Things That Take Effort

Peer Editing: Sharing Glows and Grows

Background

Sharing praises and goals—a colleague in Arkansas calls them "glows and grows"—sends the message that each piece of work has merit and that everyone can identify goals for improvement. Sharing praises and goals pushes students to go beyond a polite, positive response, or a damaging negative one. It forces them to be thoughtful and specific in their critiques.

Did You Know?

- Students often discover strengths and weaknesses in their own writing by reviewing a partner's writing.
- Developing writers increase their own vocabulary, style choices, and topic ideas by having the opportunity to read the work of other students.

Activity

Reviewing a partner's work directs students to identify several things that worked well and several things that could be improved. At the peer editing sessions, students must be prepared to do the following:

- Provide at least two praises for things that were strong in the work.
- Offer two suggestions for development or improvement.

Note: Editing control remains with the author at all times.

Materials You Will Need

- Students' work
- Colored pens or pencils for editing

For the Committed

Reading Conference: Flexible Student Grouping

Background

Reading groups are a long-held tradition in elementary classrooms throughout the United States. In most cases, reading instruction occurs in small groups of students with similar abilities. Children are aware of their perceived status as readers no matter what clever names are assigned to their reading group. Call them vultures or eagles, students know which group is "smart" and which is not.

In theory, grouping students according to their abilities is designed to help teachers provide the most appropriate pacing, materials, and instruction for all students. In reality, however, children placed in low-ability groups are at a disadvantage. In fact, the bottom group in one school may be of equal ability to the top group in another. Students placed in the bottom group may perceive themselves as poor readers, and their teachers may have lower expectations for their achievement.

Due to these perceptions, as well as qualitatively different instruction among levels of groups, the initial group designation can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. The methods of assessing reading ability, and concurrently for placing students in reading groups, are unreliable and fallible. Yet once students have been placed in a group, it is very difficult for them to switch.

In learner-centered classrooms, student groups are flexible. The teacher is a mediator of instruction, structuring opportunities for students to work together and facilitating their process. As students function at a high level of engagement with information and with each other, teachers have more freedom to interact with all groups and to check in with students in one-on-one conferences. Small groups may be organized around specific skills that the teacher wants to introduce or reinforce. The composition of the groups change as students gain mastery or require support. Small groups are also organized according to common interests in a particular topic, genres of literature, or authors.

A reading conference is a formal opportunity for these small groups to meet with the teacher. The composition of the conference group may change based on the selection students are reading or students' specific needs and interests. The reading conference is generally conducted with small groups of students, although individual student conferences can be scheduled as well.

Did You Know?

- Some researchers believe that a young child's success as a reader is determined not by ability but by the reading group into which the child is initially placed.
- Children in low reading groups do less silent reading and more reading aloud than students in high reading groups.
- Students judge their own abilities based on the group in which they are placed.

#29

For the Committed

Establishing the Climate

Background

A literature-based reading conference provides the opportunity for young readers to experience literature through interaction with others. Students support each other when they make meaning of what they read and connect it to their lives. The climate of the reading conference must be supportive and comfortable.

The reading conference enables the teacher to shape students' development and positively influence future reading selections. Conference discussions are designed to promote divergent thinking. Children understand that their responses are valued and will be given due consideration. Students have the opportunity to discuss, explain, consider new possibilities, change their minds, and engage in speculation.

Did You Know?

- To fully experience literature, we must have an opportunity to connect it to our own lives.
- Life experiences have a major effect on students' attitudes toward reading, the books they select, and their responses to literature.

Activity

Conduct the reading conference in a comfortable spot in your classroom, such as a conference table or carpeted area. It is important to arrange the seating so there is eye contact among participants.

Involve students in establishing the climate by explaining your purposes, what you hope to accomplish, and the importance of the conference. Let students have as much input in establishing the climate for the conference as possible. Ask them what kinds of supplies are important to have and what kinds of behaviors and attitudes are important to bring to the reading conference. List appropriate behaviors on chart paper and post in the reading conference area.

Ask students to create illustrations of their favorite stories or bring quotes from their favorite authors to display as decorations in the conference area.

Materials You Will Need

- Chart paper
- Watercolor markers
- Drawing materials
- Writing materials

#30

For the Committed

Student Preparation

Background

Many students are unfamiliar with reading conferences and must learn to prepare for them. A reading conference allows students to share reactions and feelings about a reading selection, hear others' points of view, clarify misconceptions or confusions about the text, extend real-life experiences by discussing related topics or issues, and make plans for further reading. Students should have these purposes in mind when preparing for a conference. A consistent format will help students to be mentally ready.

Did You Know?

- It is important to help students prepare for a successful experience if conferencing is new to them.
- Preparing for a reading conference helps students develop responsibility for their own learning and thinking.

Activity

To assist students in preparing for their first few conferences, you might require them to do one or more of the following:

- Have a selection to share.
- Bring a written reaction to the conference, perhaps a page from their reading journal.
- Bring an illustration of a scene, character, or event.
- Generate several questions or things they are wondering about regarding the story.
- Share something they have in common with a character or an event in the plot.
- Prepare a critique of the book.

Materials You Will Need

- Copies of the reading selection

#31

For the Committed

Temperature Checking

Background

The reading conference provides an opportunity for you to do "temperature checking"—touching base with students individually and assessing their academic progress. The conference enables students to ask questions, consider multiple perspectives, make connections to their own experiences, discover themes, and deepen their understanding and appreciation of literature.

Did You Know?

- The reading conference gives students an opportunity to consider and express their individual responses to literature.
- Small group reading conferences help students understand that interpretations of and responses to the same piece of writing can be varied.

Activity

Reading conferences can be scheduled specifically as an opportunity to gauge children's progress with their reading and determine whether some intervention or assistance is necessary. For this purpose, create a regular schedule with the same groups of students. For example, if you have twenty-five students, you may want to see five each day. These conferences are usually short in duration and occur at regular intervals. They provide a time-efficient method to maintain regular interaction with each student. You can check to see if they are progressing comfortably, sustaining their chosen directions, and continuing to be challenged.

A scheduled conference allows you to review reading folders prior to each session and make appropriate notations during or after your interactions. Examples of questions at this type of conference might be, "How are you doing? Need any help with anything? How are you progressing with your projects/assignments? What will you be doing next?" (See more on assessment in section 5.)

Materials You Will Need

- Recording-keeping sheet for each student
- Student reading folders

#32

For the Committed

Developing the Format

Background

To establish an environment where students are willing to speculate, take risks, and personalize their reading experiences, model these behaviors yourself. It is important that you show your own love and enthusiasm for reading. Be a co-learner by sharing your views on a piece of literature and demonstrating your processing by thinking aloud with the students. With younger or beginning readers, the conference provides an additional opportunity for modeling book handling, directionality, and using illustrations to predict and comprehend.

Did You Know?

- By maintaining a consistent conference format, children know what to expect and can to anticipate the nature of the discussion, thereby enabling them to feel more secure.
- Students should come to a reading conference knowing what to expect and being prepared to meet expectations.
- Conferences can be conducted on a one-on-one basis but can be even more effective and more time efficient with small groups.

Activity

The following format for a reading conference is based on suggestions in *Read On: A Conference Approach to Reading* by David Hornsby, Deborah Sukarna, and Jo-Ann Parry (1986).

1. Listen to children's responses to the reading material. Suggest they summarize the story or retell a particular scene or event. Model paraphrasing and clarifying responses.
2. Ask students questions that generate naturally from their own responses and that they can answer with confidence. Base the questions on literal comprehension regarding theme, character, plot, or setting. Ask questions that encourage divergent thinking, speculation, and evaluation. Have students ask each other questions. Encourage a discussion of the book. Ask students to consider alternative actions and share reactions (surprises, connections, likes, and dislikes).
3. Occasionally ask the children to read orally. The purpose of oral reading should always be connected to content, related to understanding, or for the genuine pleasure of the language.
4. Direct the students in setting goals. Ask them how they plan to extend this specific reading experience. Encourage students to choose individual activities, and help them organize shared activities. Ask students what they plan to read next and why. They should leave the reading conference with these next steps in mind.

Materials You Will Need

- Paper
- Pencil
- Prepared questions
- Students' current reading selections

#33

For the Committed

One-on-One

Background

There are a number of reasons to conduct individual reading conferences. They provide rich and direct attention to an individual child. They offer a close evaluation of individual progress and help address any immediate concerns. Individual conferences may be important for students who need additional help or are not yet confident in a small group setting.

Did You Know?

- Individual conferences can be scheduled regularly or conducted intermittently.
- An individual reading conference can be initiated by you or the student.

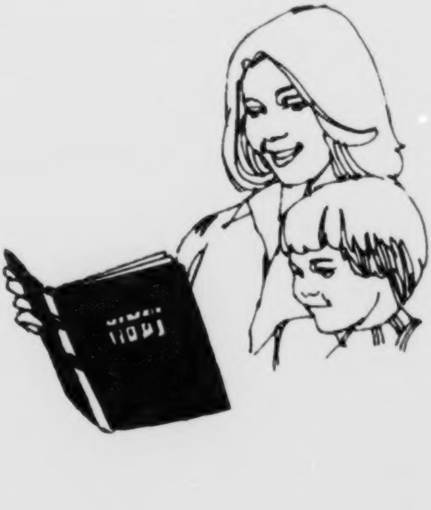
Activity

When you feel a student needs close, individual attention, schedule a one-on-one reading conference. Maintain an individual student conference log to record the date and some comments. Remark on a student's developing attitudes, skills, or knowledge.

Combine the conference log with other record-keeping devices to establish a holistic picture of the student's progress. (For more on assessment, see Section 5.)

Materials You Will Need

- Record-keeping sheet for each student



#34

For
the
Committed

Flexible Groupings

Background

There are multiple purposes for holding reading conferences. Students can gather together to discuss their reading progress based on a variety of formats and functions. A conference can be held to discuss and consider specific elements of literature, a particular author, a common theme or interest, etc.

Did You Know?

- A reading conference on a common genre helps students make connections among diverse reading materials.
- Multiple-purpose groupings allow you to monitor student progress while allowing for flexibility and choice.

Activity

Decide on a purpose and a grouping strategy for your reading conference. Here are a few possibilities:

Literature Leagues

Groups for a reading conference can be based on various organizing factors. Some possibilities include students who have been reading the same book, different books by the same author, different books with similar themes, or different books within the same genre.

SIGs

Special interest groups (SIGs) can be formed based on students' interest in topics or types of literature. SIGs can be formed around a book series, like the Madeleine L'Engle or C.S. Lewis trilogies, the Baby Sitter Club books, or Nancy Drew mysteries. SIG groups can be scheduled for an hour every Friday and attendance rotated throughout the month.

Skill and Strategy Instruction

Groups can also be assembled based on identified needs or interests. You may want to assign a reading selection and direct the questions and discussion to a specific instructional purpose, such as characterization, inferencing, phonics, or structural analysis. With younger children or less proficient readers, you may want to conduct the conference while the reading is taking place. This format is much like the guided-reading instruction in traditional classrooms. An important difference, however, is that the groups do not remain static, but are pulled together for a specific and usually temporary purpose.

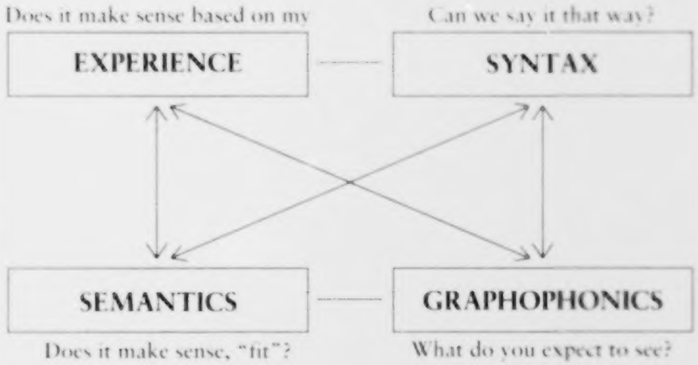
Section 3

Developing Fluency

Reading is a psycholinguistic guessing game.
—Ken Goodman

When my daughter was three, we moved from one town to another and were involved in packing our house. We had been particularly busy wrapping our fragile things when we ran out of boxes. On the errand for additional packing materials, we passed a hardware store with the word GLASS in the window in large neon letters. Happily, my daughter pointed and exclaimed, "That's the store where we got our boxes. We can get some more boxes there." When I asked her what made her think so, she replied, "That's what it says on our boxes at home!" She knew, through her own experiences, that boxes from a particular store often have the store's name printed on them. She had seen the label GLASS on the boxes at home filled with breakables. Thus, she inferred from that experience that the boxes came from that store and that we could get more.—L.L.

Children expect print to carry meaning that relates to a situation. Even before they can officially "read," children readily use knowledge of their environment to make sense of print. They sort through their prior experiences and apply what they believe to be relevant knowledge. Language offers three primary sources of information, or cueing systems: semantic, syntactic, and graphophonic. Semantics relates to connotation of words and the meaning we make from language. Syntax relates to the grammatical arrangement of words and the rules governing those arrangements. Graphophonics involves the sound-symbol relationship of language. It includes both the visual representation of language, such as letters, spelling patterns, punctuation, spacing, and the phonemic or sound system. These semantic, syntactic, and graphophonic cueing systems are used in concert with experiential knowledge to discern and create meaning while reading, writing, listening, and speaking.



Cues for Making Meaning

Does it make sense based on my
EXPERIENCE
Can we say it that way?
SYNTAX
SEMANTICS
Does it make sense, "fit"?
GRAPHOPHONICS
What do you expect to see?

Reading is a process of predicting, confirming, and integrating information. Skilled readers use these cueing systems interactively to cross-reference and confirm their predictions and the meaning they are making from the text. This cross-checking can raise discrepancies and facilitate self-correction and confirmation. Thus, it is important that students have facility and flexibility with all three sources of information without being overly dependent on any one. Proficient readers monitor and regulate themselves. They recognize when meaning has been lost and have strategies for regaining understanding.

Simple Things to Do

Developing Skills by Making Predictions

Whereas a child reading a story will immediately apprehend the motive of hungry boys ransacking a kitchen in search of the cookie jar; the same child reading about the Westward movement in this country may find the motives of the pioneers more obscure. Still, there is a parallel between the structure of stories and the structure of historical episodes that can be exploited.

—Becoming a Nation of Readers:
Report of the Commission of Reading

Background

Because I travel a great deal, my daughter Vanessa has learned some vocabulary associated with packing. In our house, we've labeled cosmetics, shampoos, and other essentials "toiletries," and, of course, when we leave home we pack our toiletry bags. Once, when she was about six, she was in her room with a friend getting ready for a sleep-

> over, and I heard uncontrollable giggling. Curious, I went into her room only to see Vanessa laughing hysterically, and her poor friend with a totally confused expression. As it turns out, Vanessa had explained that she was almost ready—she only had to pack her toiletries. Her poor confused friend was in a quandary, trying to picture what a "toilet tree" would look like—and why she would need to bring it!—L.L.

Children use what they know about the world and connect what they know about language to make meaning. From their initial encounters with language they develop a semantic and syntactic sensibility. They use these cueing systems, along with their previous experiences, to understand text. Fluent readers continually confirm predictions and generate new ones. They confirm or refine tentative understandings based on additional information, integrating new information and using it as a basis for further predictions.

Did You Know?

- Children become language users by mapping language into experience. A situation provides clues to the meaning of words.
- Students spend up to 70 percent of their allocated instructional time for reading, doing seatwork. In the average classroom, this represents an hour per day, most of which is spent on skill-and-drill sheets and workbooks.
- Specific and explicit instruction in making predictions promotes the active nature of the reading process in students.

#35

Simple Things to Do

Choosing and Using Predictable Text

Background

So much of the literature we love is built on predictable patterns. These patterns help emerging readers read independently by making "educated guesses" about the text. Research has shown most children's sense of story structure develops very quickly. By the time children who have had experiences with stories enter school, they have a surprisingly sophisticated understanding of characterization, plot, and setting. Knowledge of story structure enables readers to identify key information and remember important elements. Stories that conform to a good story structure support students' capacity to make meaning from text.

Did You Know?

- It is important to look for a good match between text and illustrations when choosing books for early readers.
- Books that are easy to dramatize provide great opportunities for extension activities.

Activity

To help students make predictions based on text patterns, choose a book with a predictable pattern to read aloud. Some patterns to look for in choosing predictable text include the following:

- Repetitive patterns organized by repetitive language or episodes (i.e., *The Gingerbread Man*).
- Cumulative patterns where stories continually add and repeat events that have occurred previously (i.e., *The Little Red Hen*).
- Interlocking patterns where the portion of a previous page will be incorporated into the following one (i.e., *Brown Bear, Brown Bear*).
- Chronological patterns, which follow a time sequence or cycle (i.e., *The Giving Tree*).
- Familiar cultural patterns, which are based on patterns such as the alphabet, days of the week, or months of the year (i.e., *Chicken Soup with Rice*).
- Rhyme/rhythm patterns where rhyme or rhythm is built into the text, sometimes found in nonsense stories (i.e., *The Cat in the Hat*).

Periodically, stop reading and allow the children to predict what will happen next. Children will naturally begin choral reading as they predict the next patterned occurrence. Allow them to chime in as you read.

Materials You Will Need

- Large selection of read-aloud books containing predictable patterns

#36

Simple
Things
to
Do

Innovations on Text

Background

Both semantic and syntactical knowledge are used strategically to derive and create meaning in reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Creatively playing with predictable patterns, or innovating on text, is an effective strategy for developing students' capacity for using semantic and syntactic cues.

Did You Know?

- Our cultural and experiential background greatly influence semantic knowledge.
- The humor found in the popular parlor game, Mad Libs, is based on syntactic and semantic knowledge.

Activity

Conduct a shared reading or read aloud a book or poem that has a predictable pattern. Invite students to develop their own stories using the fundamental patterns and elements of the original story while incorporating their own creative changes in the text. Here are some ideas:

- Change the main character. For example, in the charming book by Laura J. Numeroff, *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie*, students can change the mouse to another animal or to a person to create some interesting plot twists. Examples include *If You Give a Horse a Carrot* and *If You Give Your Mom a Hug*.
- Change the setting. Imagine if Goldilocks were a mermaid and the story took place under the ocean instead of the woods.
- Change the plot. Add a new ending, additional chapter, or an epilogue.
- Change the format. Turn a short story into a poem or a biography; turn a fairy tale into a newspaper article.
- Change the perspective. Write the story from the protagonist's or minor character's perspective. For example, what would *Three Little Pigs* be like from the wolf's perspective?

Materials You Will Need

- Book or poem containing a predictable pattern
- Writing materials

#37

Simple Things to Do

Toot! Toot!

Background

Make use of the patterns found in songs, poems, and nursery rhymes to develop syntactic and semantic strategies. Text innovation based on playground chants, holiday songs, familiar camp songs, and even rap music can be used in the classroom for creating interest, involvement, and humor. Toot! Toot! is a good example of this genre.

Did You Know?

- Shared reading is one way of immersing students in rich literary language without worrying about grade level or reading performance.
- Students build reading fluency and confidence as well as develop an appreciation of poetry by rereading poems for pleasure.

Activity

Place the following chant on a large chart paper, an overhead transparency, or in a pocket chart. Increase the speed of the reading as you proceed. After choral reading, distribute worksheets with blanks, as follows:

Toot! Toot!
A peanut sat on a railroad track,
His heart was all a flutter,
Along came engine number 9
Toot! Toot!, peanut butter!

Toot! Toot!
A ____________ sat on a railroad track,
____
Along came engine number 9
Toot! Toot! ______________!

Have students work in pairs or small groups to generate their own chants. Ask students to prepare their chants on charts or sentence strips to share with the class. Here is an example to get them started:

Toot! Toot!
A lemon sat on a railroad track,
Trying to get some shade,
Along came engine number 9
Toot! Toot!, lemonade!

As each group shares its chant, the class reads with them. It's fun to encourage the class to try to predict the final line.

Materials You Will Need

- Large chart paper, overhead projector, or pocket chart with sentence strips
- Worksheets with fill-in-the-blank chant for each student
- Writing materials

#38

Simple Things to Do

Partners Predict

Background

Partners Predict is a strategy for reading aloud that incorporates both making predictions and cooperative learning. In fact, Partners Predict is a great strategy for introducing your students to cooperatively structured activities. This strategy enhances the read-aloud experience by keeping students actively engaged with each other and the material.

Did You Know?

- Partners Predict enhances listening skills and reading comprehension.
- Adding the cooperative element of student interaction increases both motivation and learning.

Activity

Organize students into pairs prior to a shared reading. Begin by reading the title of the selection or the genre of literature. Have partners predict what the story might be about. For example, if the selection is a fairy tale, ask students to predict what they might find in the tale (magical characters, wizards, a princess, etc.). Then, periodically stop reading and ask partners to predict what might happen next. Listen to a few of the predictions and then continue the story. Students love to listen to see whether their predictions were correct.

Materials You Will Need

- Read-aloud book or poem

#39

Simple
Things
to
Do

Opin

Background

Opin is a motivating activity that generates interest in a piece of literature (or content-area material) while developing vocabulary and comprehension fluency. Originally developed by Frank Green of McGill University in Montreal, Opin incorporates writing, speaking, and listening experiences by requiring students to predict, clarify, debate, and discuss word meanings within a context.

Did You Know?

- Debate and discussion of word meaning and nuance help students connect prior knowledge and experience with text meaning.
- Discussing shades of word meanings allows students to discover the importance of context and the value of their own experiences in comprehending written material.

Activity

For each student, photocopy a segment of a story and replace ten to twelve words with blank spaces. Delete words that have many possible synonyms. Read the story to the class. Stop when you get to the Opin section and distribute the photocopies.

Step 1: Students complete the Opin sheet individually, filling in each blank with an appropriate word.

Step 2: In pairs, students compare their responses and attempt to convince their partners that their word choices are best. They must justify their claims based on the text. Students can change and refine their work or add an answer if they did not have one. Partners may even decide to generate a third choice.

Step 3: Lead a class discussion by asking, "How many of you had answers that differed from your partner's choice?" Almost every hand will go up! "How many of you changed or modified your responses based on your discussion?" Elicit a few examples and discuss them. Ask, "How many of you are curious about the author's choices?"

Step 4: Read the conclusion of the story and ask students to compare their responses to the original text. Stress that the author's choices are not the "correct answers."

To adapt Opin for primary students, retype or enlarge the text so students have room to fill in the blanks.

Materials You Will Need

- Opin exercise sheets for each student
- Writing materials

#40

Simple Things to Do

Word Splash

Background

Word Splash is adapted from a strategy called "Key Word," originally developed by reading researcher Dorsey Hammond of Oakland University in Rochester, Michigan. Word Splash is a powerful prereading strategy. It exercises prediction-making skills, provides a contextual definition for vocabulary students encounter in reading, and increases students' motivation to read.

Did You Know?

- The best way to develop vocabulary is to read diverse materials, where new words are learned incidentally.
- We introduce three times as many rare words when we read aloud to a child or during sustained silent reading than in conversation. (Rare words are those not found in the most commonly used 10,000 words.)

Activity

A Word Splash is a collection of key terms or concepts selected from a reading selection, chapter in a textbook, or audiovisual materials students are about to read, see, or hear. The selected terms are written at odd angles—splashed on a chart or overhead transparency. Another option is to give groups or individuals copies of the splash on which to record their statements. Working in pairs or small groups, students generate complete statements—not just words or phrases—that predict how the words might be used or what the selection might be about. Roles can be assigned to students; for example, recorder, reader, checker.

Once the ideas are generated, students are given the reading selection or other information. They read it together and pause at appropriate spots to check their predictions against the text presented. Students should modify their statements as needed and place a question mark next to any unclear statements.

Materials You Will Need

- Overhead projector or easel with chart paper
- Watercolor markers
- Photocopies of Word Splash sheets
- Writing materials

#41

Simple Things to Do

Say Something

Background

Jerome Harste of Indiana University originated this interactive strategy for developing students' confidence and ability to focus on meaning rather than print when reading. Fluent readers integrate semantic, syntactic, and experiential knowledge in order to predict, confirm, and interpret text. Students need to feel comfortable reading unfamiliar words and integrating the complex ideas and information they are reading.

Did You Know?

- Students learn the same information can be interpreted differently through conversation.
- Say Something helps students develop a relationship between what they are reading and what they already know.

Activity

Students work as partners, each with their own copy of a reading selection. Before reading, students decide how they will read (silently or orally—in unison or alternately) and how far they will read before stopping to react. Students then read, stopping at the predetermined point—a paragraph, a page, or a chapter—to "say something." The "something" can be a question they might have, a reaction, a description, information from either their own experiences or other sources that is confirming or contradictory. You may want to assign specific reactions or provide pairs with a list of possible "somethings."

After each pair of students have completed reading and discussing the selection, they share insights and interpretations with other pairs or individually write a journal entry.

Materials You Will Need

- A reading selection for each student
- Journals
- Writing materials

Things That Take Effort

Extending the Reading Experience

Fluency is not a state which is finally attained, one is continually arriving.

—Judith Newman

Background

The world's store of knowledge has doubled and doubled again in the twentieth century. Yet, as of this writing, twenty-three million adult Americans cannot read above the fifth-grade level. If we are to be a literate society, we must encourage students to recognize that reading is a satisfying personal experience, a quest for information, and a way of connecting with the world.

Did You Know?

- In the typical primary classroom, less than 10 percent of reading instructional time (or approximately eight minutes) is spent on silent reading. By middle school, time for silent reading averages fifteen minutes per school day.
- A weekly edition of the *New York Times* contains more information than the average person in seventeenth century England was likely to encounter in his or her lifetime.
- A typical American reads three books a year.

#42

Things That Take Effort

Figures of Speech

Background

The English language is filled with idioms. Idioms are figures of speech that carry meaning not explicitly stated in words. Idiomatic expressions are complex and can be difficult for students to understand, particularly young students and students for whom English is a second language.

Did You Know?

- Many idioms in English have analogous but not exact translations in other languages. For example, the English expression "pulling my leg" means the same as *tomando el pelo*, which translates literally as "pulling my hair."
- Body parts, common animals, and various foods are sources for many idiomatic expressions in the English language.

Activity

Generate a class list of idioms. Some examples include, "It's raining cats and dogs," "You're pulling my leg," "I'm so hungry I could eat a horse," and "You look like a million dollars!"

Students can do this task in a number of ways, including working with partners in small groups or individually. Have students review literature and identify idioms in class or assign as homework.

Once you have a list of twelve to fifteen idioms, ask students to illustrate the literal meanings of the expressions. Post these in the classroom or make a class book. Discuss why these illustrations are humorous. Contrast the literal and idiomatic meanings of the illustrations. How are idioms useful in helping us express ourselves and understand our world?

Materials You Will Need

- Writing materials
- Drawing materials

#43

Things That Take Effort

Mythical Expressions

Background

Imagination is a critical component in students' ability to read and appreciate literature. Jamake Highwater says, "Until we understand language with our imagination, we cannot express ourselves or understand what others express to us." It is important that educators provide opportunities for students to develop their imaginations and value what they create.

Did You Know?

- Imagination means creating images that are not present to the senses.
- It takes imagination to express ourselves because it takes imagination to be ourselves.

Activity

Using the idioms and illustrations created in activity 42, Figures of Speech, or specific idioms identified by students in their reading, direct students to create a story that explains how a particular idiom developed. Illustrate and share these "myths" as a class publication, bulletin board, or hallway display.

Materials You Will Need

- List of idioms
- Writing materials
- Drawing materials

#44

Things That Take Effort

Create a Comic

Background

Another way to allow children to exercise their imagination is by creating something funny. A sense of humor is a sign of intelligence and can be developed in the classroom. The familiar structure of comic strips offers a great way to develop children's senses of humor, as well as their reading and writing fluency.

Did You Know?

- Comic books are a frequent choice of students who grow up to be fluent readers.
- The enticing visual cues and simple sentences of comic books give the struggling young reader "training wheels" while developing proficiency.

Activity

Survey the class for favorite comic strips and comic-strip characters. Encourage students to bring in their favorite funnies from the Sunday paper and provide a forum for sharing.

Choose several student samples and ask students to create their own comics. This can be done by copying the full strip and leaving the final block blank for students to create their own ending, or by copying the full strip and leaving all the bubbles blank for students to fill in their own dialogue.

As an extension activity, students create their own comic strips based on class or school activities and people. Create class comic books by developing "familiar" characters of your own.

Materials You Will Need

- Comic strip samples
- Photocopies of samples with blocked areas
- Writing materials
- Drawing materials

#45

Things
That
Take
Effort

Finding Common Ground

Background

In the learner-centered classroom, students are regarded as independent thinkers who influence and are influenced by the larger learning community. Each student is a complex individual identity. Opportunities for students to share their thoughts and consider others' perspectives are critically important. When students respectfully disagree and then come to some sort of agreement, they learn how to examine an issue from multiple points of view.

Did You Know?

- Several studies indicate that using instructional time to build background knowledge increases reading comprehension.
- Reading instruction and subject matter instruction are more powerful when integrated. However, there is little indication that such integration occurs in routine classroom practice.

Activity

This activity can be used to explore controversial issues based on social studies content, current events, health topics, or life in school or at home. Ask students to discuss with a partner an assigned issue through loosely structured "interviewing." When they find something they have in common, they say "O.K." and stop. Each student takes a few minutes to write down his or her reflections about the interaction and the areas of agreement and disagreement. Then each student reads what they've written, clarifying and refining. Finally, the pairs synthesize their reflections into several paragraphs to submit to the teacher or read to the class.

Materials You Will Need

- Writing materials

For the Committed

Integrating Instruction

[To be] transdisciplinary [is to be] beyond the scope of the disciplines; that is to start with a problem and bring to bear knowledge from the disciplines.

—L. Meeth

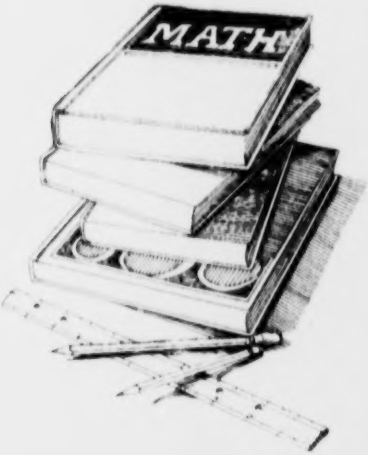
Background

On a recent visit to a second grade classroom in upstate New York, a life-sized poster of an armored knight greeted me at the door. I saw schematics of castles, a large wall mural illustrating a medieval scene with royalty and serfs, knights and horses, and a semantic web on the board with vocabulary and ideas from *The Black Falcon*. On the daily calendar, each date was written inside a little turret and the name tags on each student's desk read "Princess Susan" or "Prince Raoul." The class was enthusiastic and informed me that they had been learning about medieval times, architecture, social structure, and folk legends and literature. The thematic unit had evolved from a story in their basal reader about a young princess and sparked children's natural interests.— L.L.

In "real life," content area distinctions blur and disciplines overlap. Children should not have to be their own curriculum coordinators. When teachers organize instruction through integrated thematic units, students see the connections between subjects and subject areas and become more involved with the multiple aspects of the information they are learning. Skills, knowledge, and attitudes are reinforced within and across disciplines.

Did You Know?

- By integrating information and connecting content areas, all learned information becomes more accessible and usable to students.
- Once content areas are connected, learners make connections and draw relationships of their own.
- When curriculum is set in the context of authentic human experience, its relevance to real-life learning becomes clearer for students.



#46

For the Committed

Student-Selected Theme Topics

Background

One of the most common forms of curriculum integration is the thematic unit. Themes range from energy consumption to homelessness. Teachers select theme topics based on content mandated for their grade level and necessary instructional materials.

Themes ignite student learning especially when the students are involved in selecting them. Student-selected themes ensure relevant learning. Once students see the connection between things they are using in life, learning at school becomes purposeful and meaningful.

Did You Know?

- Integration does not negate basic skills. An integrated approach, allows students to learn skills such as literacy and numeracy within real-world contexts.
- Students' learning should include both content-based experiences and interdisciplinary experiences.

Activity

Lead your class through a brainstorm session of topics to study. Ask the students what local and global issues they are interested in, and record their ideas on chart paper or an overhead projector. Examples may include energy consumption, public housing, gun control, homelessness, pollution, animal rights, etc. As the group discusses the topics, suggest combinations of related ideas to make each topic more comprehensive. When at least twenty to thirty ideas have been generated, allow students to vote and narrow down the list until consensus is reached.

Once a topic has been selected, determine what the students already know and what they would like to learn about it. Make a two-column class chart, listing what the students know on the left side and questions they have on the right. Help students form teams to study particular questions about the topic. Use the two-column chart to guide your integrated instruction.

Materials You Will Need

- Chart paper or transparencies
- Watercolor markers or transparency pens

#47

For the Committed

Civic Projects

Background

In life, a variety of skills and knowledge are applied toward working successfully in a variety of contexts. We don't view the world in subject matter fragments, yet we often organize the instructional day in discreet packets of discipline-oriented time. One way for students to experience an integrated, interdisciplinary curriculum is to involve them in a service project in their community. A civic project synthesizes learning from various disciplines and shows students that learning is applicable in the real world.

Did You Know?

- Integrating curriculum cultivates students' thinking skills.
- Integrated learning emphasizes content knowledge and understanding in relation to broader issues and perspectives.

Activity

Generate student interest in a civic project by reading aloud a newspaper article about someone providing service to another person or group. Consider with your students the wide range of projects they could perform in their own community. Discuss ideas such as community beautification, crime fighting, the environment, health, the elderly, literacy, politics, and safety. Allow students to collaborate on and propose a specific project to the class. Following class discussion, use a voting system to decide which civic project will be undertaken.

To accomplish the civic project, everyone must research the topic using books and articles, interviews, community records, and videos. Student committees should be established to define goals, set schedules, estimate costs, consider the needs and availability of the recipients, create advertising, and gather needed materials. During the project, students should capture the event with note-taking and video/audio taping. After the project, encourage students to reflect on their experience through discussion, writing, drama, and artwork. Analyze the kinds of skills and strategies the students have used throughout the project and design further instructional activities based on data and learning gained from the experience. See *The Kid's Guide to Service Projects* (Lewis 1995) for descriptions of civic projects.

Materials You Will Need

- Newspaper article about a person providing service to another person or group
- Reference materials
- Writing materials
- Video and/or audio equipment

#48

For the Committed

Imagine If You Were . . .

Background

Effective curriculum integration centers on a theme that blurs the boundaries among subject areas and focuses on the development of important skills and attitudes. This approach to learning offers opportunities for highly engaging, innovative instructional activities. Among the possibilities are projects, problem-based learning, and action research. In each of these areas, simulations that capture students' imaginations and have real-life application are powerful instructional tools for an interdisciplinary approach.

Did You Know?

- Role scenarios allow students to gain multiple perspectives on an issue, explore interesting professions, and apply critical skills for lifelong learning.
- Role scenarios allow students to engage in complex problem solving. Students apply their critical and creative thinking to non-structured problems they encounter outside of class.

Activity

Using role scenarios in your learner-centered classroom allows students to exercise their imaginations, work individually or with teammates, and choose a role or area of study they find intriguing. Ask students to imagine themselves in a particular role. Then have them solve a problem or complete a specific task or project from the perspective of that role. Following are some examples of roles:

Museum Curator

- Describe, create, or illustrate an exhibit.
- Make decisions about what items to include and why.

Advertising Agency Director

- Review a piece of advertising for bias.
- Create a marketing campaign and develop promotional materials.
- Design a book jacket or a movie poster.

Tour Organizer

- Design travel or cultural guides within specific contexts or parameters, such as an architectural tour in the year 2165.

Psychologist/Sociologist

- Develop a survey and create a visual or graphic display of the results.
- Draw conclusions to present to the class.

Archaeologist/Anthropologist

- Review information such as a video clip, artifact, or description for clues regarding culture, time frame, and social context or purpose.
- Collect artifacts and create their "story."

Philosopher

- Compose essays on essential questions, such as "What is the meaning of life?"

Newspaper Editor or Journalist

- Write a publication during a specific historical period.
- Write an easy-to-understand article on a complex subject.
- Write editorials or opinions from multiple perspectives.

Historian

- Analyze controversial accounts of historical events.
- Interview others to compose an oral history.
- Write a bibliographic essay that presents an analysis and synthesis of three different sources on the same topic, event, or theme.
- Design a meaningful textbook and create an outline or table of contents.
- Predict a future event based on a past event.

Personnel Director

- Create interview questions.
- Develop criteria for a "quality" employee, productive team member, excellent student.

Teacher

- Develop a meaningful lesson plan.
- Describe how you would teach a complex topic, sequence of events, specific operation, or solution to groups with varying characteristics or special circumstances.

Expert Witness

- Give testimony to a Congressional panel or grand jury about a specific historical event.

Play or Movie Director

- Give a character analysis and stage directions for a specific scene in a play.

Scout Leader

- Create requirements for a new merit badge, such as the "ideal sixth grade student" or the "expert problem-solver."

Materials You Will Need

- Writing materials
- Drawing materials

Section 4

Nurturing Lifelong Learners

Children who are not answered will stop asking questions. And children who are not told stories and who are not read to will have few reasons for wanting to learn to read.
—Gail E. Haley

My first teaching job was with a class of ungraded six- and seven-year-olds in a residential setting with very few resources. It was important to me to provide my students with varied experiences in an atmosphere of safety and comfort and to be an excellent scavenger. At the time, I was living in a cabin on a lake. One day I discovered an irreparable hole in the bottom of our rowboat. Turning bad luck to good, I installed the boat in the corner of my classroom. Filled with pillows, it became a choice spot during "drop everything and read" (DEAR) time. Above the boat, strung across the wall, was an old fishing net decorated with bright letters that read "Get Hooked on a Book." Splashed across the net were colorful cardboard fish—small yellow guppies, larger red barracuda, and big blue sharks. After a book conference, students "filled out" a guppy with the name of the book, the author, and the illustrator and hooked it on the net. Ten guppies could be exchanged for a barracuda and five barracuda for a big blue shark. While there were various accolades and privileges for increasing the number of books read, being a shark was considered a special accomplishment. Each month, the reading sharks got to have lunch with the principal!

Years later, while standing in a line at Disney World, a young man approached me and introduced himself as a former "Big Blue Shark" from all those years ago. Today, he is an elementary school principal who reads aloud to each class regularly. As teachers, the time, energy, and love we invest can yield unexpected windfalls.—L.L.

Simple
Things
to
Do

Read-Alouds and Shared Reading

> *Few children learn to love books by themselves. Someone has to lure them into the wonderful world of the written word; someone has to show them the way.*
>
> —Orville Prescott

Background

A well-balanced literacy development program includes reading to children, reading by children, and reading with children. Reading out loud to children helps them develop a love for good literature, motivation to pursue reading on their own, and familiarity with a variety of genre.

The best choices for read-alouds are books, poems, and stories that you love yourself. Your enthusiasm and joy will come through as you share the work with your students and enjoy it once again through their eyes.

Did You Know?

- In a nurturing learning environment, we note what children can do, rather than what they cannot do.
- Listening comprehension comes before reading comprehension. The listening vocabulary is the reservoir of words that feeds the reading vocabulary pool.

#49

Simple Things to Do

Familiarity Breeds Confidence

Background

Just as with a bedtime story, shared reading allows students to revisit familiar literature and discover new adventures in a warm and supportive environment. Start with simple rhymes, songs, and poems that may already be part of the children's repertoire. These shared reading experiences demonstrate and reinforce reading as both pleasurable and meaningful.

Did You Know?

- Occasionally allowing the class to choose the book for sharing includes them in the experience.
- Exposure to a variety of literary genres prepares students to be more fluent readers and writers.

Activity

Choose a read-aloud that interests students and connects with what you are studying in class. For example, Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House* books are perfect read-alouds in most fifth grade classrooms that are studying westward expansion. For younger students, choose a book that can be completed in one sitting. For older students, read a little each day from a chapter book. The selection should appeal to you and model the conventions of language and good literature.

Set the scene by sharing the title, cover illustration, and something about the author or setting. Then read the text, showing the illustrations and the text itself whenever possible. *(Note: Large books of many classic primary stories are available. These Big Books allow students to read along with you).*

Don't be surprised if your learners seek out their own copies of the story to read and reread on their own!

Materials You Will Need

- Books, poems, and stories of various genres

#50

Simple Things to Do

We Are Readers

Background

When students keep track of their own growing list of readings, a record exists that can reveal preferences, gaps in reading experiences, and consistent choices. Even more importantly, learners have a tangible record of accomplishment. A class list of readings, displayed prominently, allows students to share recommendations and seek out others who have similar reading preferences. This type of record helps determine special groups, activities, and enrichment for your class.

Did You Know?

- Experience with a variety of literature and other reading materials is important for developing readers and writers.
- Reading lists help students set goals for their literacy learning.

Activity

Keep a growing list of titles of books read by individuals and by the class. Class lists can be general or categorized in a number of ways:

- genre of literature
- interest groups
- author or illustrator

Post the lists on large chart paper. These charts help connect students who have read the same titles or are interested in recommendations. The charts also display the amount and variety of reading material that has been consumed—so students can see they are indeed readers.

Materials You Will Need

- Individual lists for each student
- Large chart paper
- Watercolor markers

#51

Simple
Things
to
Do

Sustained Silent Reading

Background

The premise of Sustained Silent Reading (SSR), is a simple one: students need an opportunity to independently exercise their newly developed skills. Using SSR is just as simple; students choose something to read and spend a short amount of time and attention reading it. First introduced in the early 1960s by Lyman C. Hunt Jr., a professor at the University of Vermont, SSR, also called USSR (Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading) and even SQUIRT (Sustained Quiet Uninterrupted Independent Reading Time), increases the amount of time students spend with books. SSR can also develop dramatic changes in reading ability and, perhaps more importantly, in positive attitudes toward reading.

Did You Know?

- Reading is a skill; the more you practice, the better you become.
- SSR involves students reading as a recreational activity.
- SSR is effective when used schoolwide.

Activity

To institute a Sustained Silent Reading program, you will need to consistently devote time each day for everyone in the class to spend time reading a book of their choice. After lunch or right before recess are good times for SSR. You might have students choose or have available their reading material before lunch. Then, conduct SSR as soon as the class returns.

A few important tips for a successful program:

- Limit the amount of sustained reading time. Approximately ten minutes to begin is an appropriate amount. Increase the time in small increments.
- Allow students free choice in their reading materials, and do not connect any assignments or reports to this reading.
- Once students have selected their reading materials, they must quietly sit and read. Students cannot change books during SSR time.
- Everyone in the class must read quietly—especially adults. You and any aides or parent volunteers provide critical role models and must join the children in this activity.

Materials You Will Need

- Readily available literature and reading materials

Things
That
Take
Effort

Writing Centers: Reading/Writing Connection

Background

> Years ago, when I was nursing my daughter, I had a great deal of time to catch up on reading I had never gotten to. I reread classics and relished contemporary novels, reading new works of familiar authors and discovering new authors who would become lifelong favorites. One of these, John Irving, had just written The World According to Garp. After reading it, I recommended it to a good friend with whom I discussed the unfolding story as she progressed through it. I was up with the baby at 2:00 a.m. one morning when I heard the phone ring. It was my friend, who felt compelled to call and share her shock over a particular—and emotionally moving—passage. Only love of baby and literature could keep me up at that hour!—L.L.

If students are to become lifelong lovers of literature, they need to have an opportunity to discuss what they are reading; to argue, recommend, commiserate, and identify with the characters and their exploits. Students must read a variety of genres and have time to choose their own reading materials. They must also have time to actually read the materials and give and receive feedback on them.

Did you Know?

- The most predictable text for early readers is the text they have personally created.
- Uninterrupted reading and writing are essential elements in a process-oriented, learner-centered classroom.

#52

Things That Take Effort

Purposeful Tasks

Background

Demonstrate that writing is an important method for communication by engaging students in authentic, purposeful writing tasks. Have students write notes to their parents; letters to students, teachers, or the principal; invitations to a social event; journal entries; or reactions to music or a film. By providing a wide variety of relevant writing experiences, students learn that different purposes require different styles and formats.

Did You Know?

- The reading process is best learned by using complete forms of written language.
- Familiarity with different forms of writing supports students' ability to make predictions and read with fluency.

Activity

Relevant opportunities for writing are plentiful in the learner-centered classroom. Have students do the following:

- Write letters to their favorite author, a character in a book, a senior citizen, or an international pen pal; in support of a politically or socially appropriate cause; or for information on a project they are researching.
- Keep personal journals or diaries in which students express themselves or react to changes inside and around them; response journals where they note reactions to content-area information, such as a current event, lab experiment, or math problem; curiosity journals in which they keep a list of questions of things they would like to know more about; literature logs in which they react, with increasing sophistication, to various elements of literature, such as characters, plot, and setting.
- Write books for publication in a class or school publishing center.

Materials You Will Need

- Writing materials

#53

Things That Take Effort

Published and Unpublished Work

Background

Not all written work becomes a published piece. Reviewing students' writing is an important way for you, and for them, to track their progress and establish learning goals. Place samples of students' work in their writing folders and keep them in the writing center for easy access. Students will then choose a piece to publish and work to create a product worth sharing. While you may have a minimum number of published pieces from each student, it is important for them to have some choice in deciding what to publish and how.

Did You Know?

- When students have some choice and flexibility regarding which work to publish and in what format, they display greater perseverance and attention during the editing process.
- Students should understand that not choosing to continue with a piece of writing does not constitute failure.

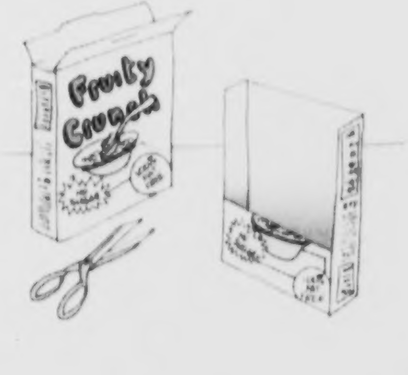
Activity

Have students experiment with a number of writing formats and keep them in a writing folder. These folders can be filed in a milk crate, cardboard box, or in cereal boxes cut open on the top and two-thirds down one side for ease of storage. Allow students to illustrate their folders to personalize them for easy identification.

Staple student editing checklists and writing guidelines to the writing folders or place them at the writing center. Students should have an opportunity to review and evaluate their work by themselves or with a peer prior to their writing conferences (see activities 27 and 28).

Materials You Will Need

- Folders
- Drawing materials
- Milk crates, cereal boxes, or cardboard boxes
- Editing checklists and writing guidelines



#54

**Things
That
Take
Effort**

Paths to Publication

Background

Finalizing written work for "publication" helps students perceive themselves as writers. Students publish their work in a wide variety of formats. They create labels, book jackets, or posters that advertise a favorite book, a class event, or an election campaign. They organize their writing into magazines, book reviews, or research reports to be distributed outside the classroom.

Did You Know?

- Providing avenues for publishing student work allows children to see their efforts valued.
- Student publications should be made available to other readers and be added to the variety of class reading resources.

Activity

There are a variety of ways to share students' budding writing with others. You may choose to do any of the following:

- Have a special section in the class library for student authors.
- Develop a monthly journal, perhaps with rotating themes, that highlights students' work.
- Send a class magazine or newspaper home to parents.
- Create a riddle book, an etiquette book for students in your grade or school, or an advice column.
- Distribute the class' book, music, TV show, and movie reviews.
- Write books to be read to the principal, other adults in the school, or students in other grade levels.
- Conduct surveys on student issues. For example, "Should students be expected to . . . ?"; "How much homework is reasonable?"; "My favorite __________." Students can publish and post the results in the hallway using graphs with captions.

Materials You Will Need

- Writing materials
- Drawing materials

For the Committed

Building a Community of Learners

Community and connectedness are the hallmarks of a good learning environment.
—Judith Newman

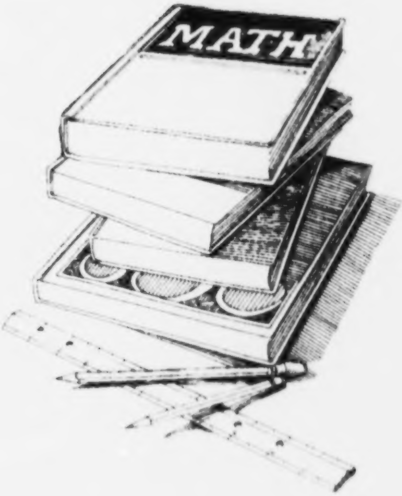
Background

> I once spent a six-hour flight from Los Angeles to Honolulu sharing favorite stories and swapping reading recommendations with the passenger sitting next to me. Based on our conversation, I ended up giving her the book I had just finished, which I knew she'd love!—L.L.

Sharing experiences about reading is vital in developing an appreciation for literature. For young children, literacy development is dependent on the literacy experiences available to them at home. When schools cultivate partnerships with parents and reach out to the community as a resource, everyone benefits.

Did You Know?

- Students achieve more in cooperative interaction than in competitive or individualistic interaction.
- Group development norms show that students must experience inclusion, influence, and affection in order for the group to function effectively and for academic learning to occur.



#55

For the Committed

Literature Clubs

Background

Literature clubs are an instructional strategy designed to give learners control over their own reading. Students select books to read and discuss with their peers based on interest rather than reading ability. The teacher acts as a facilitator, at times listening to the daily group discussions about their reading. After reading a book, the clubs design a creative way to share their reading with other classmates, thereby motivating others to choose the book at another time.

Did You Know?

- Students should spend more time actually reading in school than listening to the teacher talk about reading.
- Students as young as seven years old are able to maintain literature clubs, carrying on meaniagful dialogues about books and honoring group-imposed timelines.

Activity

Gather four to six copies of several intriguing titles. Briefly discuss each book, perhaps even reading aloud the first chapter so students can sense the flavor of the book. Allow students to indicate first and second choices, then form heterogeneous groups of four to six students. Depending on the length of the titles selected—and age of the students—set a reasonable timeline for completion of the book. Encourage the clubs to break up their texts into readable chunks, such as two chapters per day or night. Each day in class, give students time to read and meet with each other to discuss that day's reading. Act as a facilitator, rotating from group to group during their discussions. Be careful not to control or direct the groups; simply listen to their reactions and, if appropriate, offer your feelings about the reading. When the clubs have completed their books, have them develop a creative way to share their reading with the rest of the class. They may perform a commercial for the book, act out a favorite scene, or write a description.

Variation

Organize literature clubs so that all groups read related but different titles. For example, students might read different books by the same author or books of the same genre. In this way, a comparative aspect adds dimension to your instruction.

Materials You Will Need

- 4–6 copies each of various books

#56

For the Committed

Join the Chorus

Background

Choral reading is a form of shared reading that effectively builds classroom community. Typically found only in the primary grades, choral reading is a powerful motivator for students of all ages and reading abilities. It is a very supportive instructional strategy. The teacher models the reading while students follow the text, allowing students to hear the rhythm and the overall sound of the reading. Quality poetry is a good choice and will add to the success of choral reading.

Did You Know?

- Choral reading is an excellent morning routine—a daily habit that can start students off on a wonderful day.
- Choral reading is appropriate for all students, including special education children and second language learners, because everyone can participate.

Activity

Collect poems that appeal to your students and transfer them to a transparency or sheet of chart paper. Use one poem for several sessions. Introduce the poem by reading it aloud to the class. Reread the poem, inviting students to join in. You may choose to have the students echo you or simply read with you. Read and reread the poem many times, giving out lines to clusters of children, alternating boys and girls, or reading loudly then softly. As students experience repeated readings—which can occur over several days—many of them will memorize the poem. This allows them to focus even more on their oral intonation and presentation.

Once students have had success with the class choral reading, give groups of students another poem. Assign each group the task of preparing a choral performance for the class. Encourage the students to creatively use their voices to reveal the full meaning of the poem. Most students love this routine, and choral reading can quickly develop into a meaningful class ritual, resulting in an increased sense of community in the classroom.

Materials You Will Need

- Poems
- Transparencies or large chart paper
- Overhead projector
- Watercolor markers or transparency pens

#57

For the Committed

Mine, Yours, and Ours

Background

Developed by Harste, Short, and Burke (1988), this strategy helps students gain understanding of various points of views. It capitalizes on the constructivist concept that asserts that everything we learn is connected to previous learning. Therefore, our understandings and perspectives on things are very personal. Students who appreciate multiple perspectives find the greatest success living in a diverse society.

Did You Know?

- Our understandings of the world are influenced by and influence others' understandings of the world.
- Students need practice defining their own perspectives, recognizing other perspectives, and identifying tensions between the two.

Activity

After students participate in a common experience, such as a field trip or reading the same book, have them write a summary of the most significant aspects of that experience. Then, have students work in pairs to compare their summaries and discover connections between them. Encourage students to discuss where they agree and disagree and what information or interpretations are in one person's summary but not in the other's.

After their discussion, the students can individually or collaboratively write a paragraph explaining the differences they found and why they responded the way they did.

To extend this activity, students can (1) read another book and summarize it the way they think their partner would; (2) read books that present the same story from different perspectives; or (3) take a piece of their own writing and retell the story from someone else's viewpoint.

Materials You Will Need

- Writing materials

Section 5

Strategies for Assessing Student Growth

> *The fundamental goal of teaching and learning in schools should be that every learner is guaranteed optimal instruction and opportunity to reach his or her educational potential. Assessment and evaluation practices are legitimate only to the extent that they serve this goal.*
>
> —Leanna Traill

The purpose of assessment in a learner-centered classroom is to inform instruction. The most effective literacy assessment occurs within the context of real literacy activities, with students exhibiting what they know and don't know about how print works. Instructional decisions are based on children's strengths, weaknesses, and needs. Just as physicians recognize patterns of physical growth in children, learner-centered teachers understand patterns of literacy growth. Neither physician nor teacher is surprised at individual differences among children, yet both are aware of developmental guideposts and can recognize where a child is placed on the developmental continuum. Effective teachers identify students' developmental levels, then structure classroom activities so the students are supported and stretched into the next level of growth and understanding. Teachers carefully collect and analyze data about students' processes and products in a way that establishes a strong connection between the assessment data and the teacher's instructional plans. Effective teachers realize that growth is not always linear—students will have spurts of growth with peaks and valleys. Information is gathered over time, resulting in a profile of student achievement.

Simple
Things
to
Do

Kid-Watching in the Classroom

Background

The most fundamental part of assessment involves careful, systematic observation of students in a variety of contexts. Only through such observation are teachers truly aware of students' growth and progress through the stages of literacy development. Observation should occur in the natural setting of the learning environment and should involve watching, listening, and interacting with students. Teachers notice and record behaviors that students exhibit and later reflect on their observations. Everything a child says and does is a source of information about that child's development.

In recording your observations, use descriptive sentences or phrases. Examples include: "11/24/96—Patrick is using his pointer finger to track the print in *Over in the Meadow.*" "11/24/96—Joanne's narrative piece about Thanksgiving includes characters, setting, and four action events." "11/24/96—Josh continues to choose nonfiction in the Reading Center; he's especially into space right now."

Writing objectively and descriptively is the key. Analysis of what you've seen should be done later. When reflecting on these records, you might conclude that Patrick is moving through the emergent stage of reading and may be ready to locate individual words on the page. Your information about Joanne suggests that she has a sense of story and may be ready to experiment with another genre. Josh's behavior reveals that he has found a special interest; depending upon the length of his interest in nonfiction, you may choose to either help him locate more books on this topic, or help him find some fiction pieces he might enjoy. Used in such a way, anecdotal records based on "kid-watching" become an important source of planning for the teacher.

Did You Know?

- One advantage of observation is that it is not an obtrusive assessment; it takes place during typical reading and writing events.
- Knowledge and skills are not the only important points to observe in children; noting their attitudes is equally important.

#58

Simple Things to Do

Anecdotal Records

Background

Anecdotal records are brief notes that record observations of actual verbal and nonverbal behaviors. They are descriptive in nature, capturing events with enough detail so the teacher makes evaluations and judgments at a later point. Teachers vary considerably in record content, but most learn to note behaviors that indicate literacy growth (i.e., holding a book right-side-up for the first time, using one's finger as a pointer when reading, using temporary spelling instead of asking the teacher, etc.) Analyzed over time, anecdotal records help the teacher see patterns of growth and development, and allow insight into the child's interests, strengths, and weaknesses.

Did You Know?

- Useful anecdotal records always involve at least two critical elements: the date and a descriptive comment specific to what the child is doing.
- Anecdotal records are a valid source of assessment when combined with professional teacher judgment.

Strategy

To take anecdotal records, you must manage the classroom in such a way that students are self-directed and operate without direct instruction or supervision during part of the day. For instance, set up a writer's or reader's workshop or allow students to cycle through various learning centers. This allows you to closely observe a few students a day. Instead of trying to watch everyone doing everything, identify four or five "focus students." Notice the behaviors and attitudes of these particular students throughout the day. By day's end, you will have rich notes about these few students rather than sparse notes about many children. In one week, you should be able to obtain valuable information about each member of your class.

Materials You Will Need

- Record-keeping sheets for each student

#59

Simple Things to Do

A Nifty Notebook

Background

There are many ways to manage anecdotal records, but organization is key to the success of this assessment approach. While individual records do reveal something about the child on a given day, the real power of anecdotal records comes in analyzing them over a longer period of time. A collection of six weeks' worth of records offers important information regarding a student's literacy development and indicates what the student needs in order to move into the next level.

Did You Know?

- Many teachers periodically move notes from an observation notebook into a set of file folders for year-long storage.
- It is very enlightening for parents to see anecdotal records about their child taken over time.

Strategy

To organize your notes, keep a three-ring notebook with a divider for each student. File the dividers in alphabetical order by the students' last names. Carry this binder with you during conferences. When you meet with a child, turn to his or her section of your notebook and record your information on the pages there. You may wish to write on blank notebook paper or design a page with space designated for comments about reading, writing, attitudes, etc. Share your observations—both current and past—with the student from time to time, as well as with his or her parents at conferences. Keep your binder very flexible, so you can always add more pages as you fill up space or receive new students in your class. If the book becomes too cumbersome, remove some pages and store them in file folders.

Materials You Will Need

- Three-ring notebook with dividers for each student
- Predesigned record-keeping sheets

#60

Simple Things to Do

Sticky Helpers

Background

Developing a workable system of taking and storing anecdotal records is important. Instead of carrying around an entire binder full of notebook paper, many teachers have created shortcuts and adaptations. Experiment with different methods so you can find the one most suitable to your own needs.

Did You Know?

- You can best capture important information regarding student development by using a variety of collection strategies.
- Anecdotal records capture "critical incidents" that occur naturally and continually throughout the school day.

Strategy

Using a clipboard, carry a sheet of mailing labels or a page full of sticky notes. As you observe students, write on the labels noting the date, child's name, and your observations. At the end of the day, peel off the labels and place each one on an individual sheet or folder for each student. By writing students' names on the labels at the beginning of a two-week period and peeling the "completed" ones off at the end of each day, it becomes very easy to see who you have yet to observe.

Mailing labels and computer labels are available at warehouse prices when bought in large quantities through office supply catalogs. Peel-off labels can truly simplify the storage process of anecdotal records. Removable notes come in a variety of sizes and are appropriate for jotting down observations about students.

Materials You Will Need

- Clipboard
- Sheets of mailing labels, computer labels, or sticky notes
- Folders

#61

Simple Things to Do

Individual Student Checklists

Background

Checklists are a useful tool for recording observations during or after instruction. Some teachers with a depth of understanding about reading and writing create their own checklists. A checklist can indicate to teachers what they should be looking for as signs of literacy growth.

Be aware that a single checklist never includes all the significant behaviors students exhibit. Likewise, many students function successfully without mastering every item on the checklist. Use checklists as a guide, always to be supplemented by anecdotal records.

Did You Know?

- Checklists help inform administrators, parents, and community members about what kinds of behaviors are valued.
- Teachers need to be cautious when using checklists; the tendency may be to focus on the checklist rather than the individual child.

Strategy

After deciding which important literacy, social skills, and behaviors you wish to see in your classroom, create a checklist. List the behaviors on the lefthand side of a page and title columns across the top as "Not Yet," "Seldom," "Sometimes," "Usually," and "Always." Having one sheet for each child, review each behavior and mark the individual student accordingly. The result is a "snapshot" of each child on any given day. This checklist is most helpful during individual student and parent conferences, when you focus on the child's strengths and areas for development.

Use checklists early in the semester and at regular intervals to determine student growth.

Materials You Will Need

- Observation checklists for each student

#62

Simple Things to Do

Class Checklists

Background

To get a sense of where your entire class is on specific behaviors and skills, use a class checklist. It allows you to see which students have demonstrated understanding about a given item and which students may need to be in a flexible grouping for specific instruction.

Did You Know?

- Information gleaned from a class checklist should always be considered within the context of all of the other assessments taking place in your classroom. The checklist is simply a guide.
- Differences among students on a class checklist are common; learning occurs in varying stages for everyone.

Strategy

To create a class checklist, list behaviors on one side of a sheet of paper each class member's name across the top. As you see students in your classroom exhibiting various behaviors, either check off the corresponding box or write in the date of your observation. This way, you will be aware of who has acquired which skills and who may be in need of further instruction. Be aware that checking off a behavior does not mean the student never needs another experience in a certain arena; it simply means that achievement or understanding was demonstrated.

Materials You Will Need

- Class checklists for various behaviors

#63

Simple Things to Do

Historical Checklists

Background

Teachers continually return to historical checklists throughout the semester or year. These checklists may be stored in a notebook or inside the cover of each student's portfolio. Add information at specific times throughout the year and when key observations occur.

Did You Know?

- With a longitudinal checklist, a student's growth is charted over time. Parents often enjoy discussing this type of checklist with teachers and learning about their child's developing abilities.
- Marking your calendar at the beginning of the year with various "checkpoints" (i.e., once a month) helps you remember to update your historical checklists. It's hard to make quality observations if you try to do them all the week before the semester ends!

Strategy

List desired behaviors on the left hand side of a sheet of paper. Across the top, list checkpoint dates—or leave each column blank, to be dated as you make your observations. It is also useful to leave room for qualitative comments on the side or bottom of the page.

At the appropriate time, revisit the checklist and consider the student's current overall behavior. Make a comment or note about each specific behavior on the list. Put the checklist aside, then when the next checkpoint time comes around—usually about one month later—make comments in the next column.

Carefully reflect on each student's growth or lack of growth. Use this information to plan instruction accordingly.

Materials You Will Need

- Student checklists

#64

Simple Things to Do

Interviews

Background

Interviews reveal students' thinking about reading and writing. With purposeful probing, a teacher often discovers students' ideas and misconceptions about literacy. While some students may not be entirely aware of what strategies they use when they read or write, interview questions help them become increasingly conscious of their own thinking.

Did You Know?

- Interviews can be conducted as separate entities or as a natural part of instruction.
- Oral interviews result in rich information, because most students often say more than they write in response to a teacher's questions.

Strategy

When conducted as a separate entity, an interview consists of a series of preplanned questions. One example is Carolyn Burke's Reading Inventory, in which students are asked questions such as these:

- When you are reading and come to something you don't know, what do you do?
- Who do you know who is a good reader? What makes him or her a good reader?
- If you knew someone was having trouble reading, how would you help that person?
- What would your teacher do to help that person?
- How did you learn to read?
- What would you like to do better as a reader?
- Do you think you are a good reader?

This interview uncovers the student's view of themselves as readers, as well as their perceptions of the reading process, and it suggests instructional implications. For instance, if the student's responses all focus on sounding out the words, you would know that the child needs instruction on alternative reading strategies, such as using context clues, skipping a word and coming back, and using illustrations.

Conduct your interviews at the beginning, middle, and end of the year to determine student perceptions and to note growth in understanding.

Many interviews such as the Burke Reading Inventory are available commercially. Teachers can also create their own questions.

Materials You Will Need

- Preplanned interview questions

#65

Simple
Things
to
Do

Open-Ended Questions

Background

When interviews are used as a natural part of instruction, they can be informal and personalized. Interviews commonly occur during conferencing within a reader's or writer's workshop. Orally conducted interviews with individual students allow teachers to probe for specifics and gain an understanding of the student's thinking. Anecdotal records can be kept to document the student's responses.

Did You Know?

- Effective interview questions are nondirective and reflective, probing students' thinking and allowing the teacher to follow their thought processes.
- There is a wealth of professional literature available about the importance of nonverbal communication. Be aware of what your body language is saying while you question your students, you can be sure *they* will!

Strategy

Circulate around your classroom, stopping to visit with individual students. Use open-ended questions, such as, "Tell me what you are doing here," "How did you make the decision to use this word?" and "What strategies are you using to solve this problem?" As you phrase your questions, remember to avoid the possibility of yes or no answers or to sound as if you are second-guessing the student's response. Ask for clarification and probe, but do not lead, a student. The purpose is to determine what the student thinks, not what you think. Jot down a few notes either during or after the interview so you can reflect on what the student has shared.

When students have the opportunity to share their thinking, they feel a sense of inclusion and importance in your classroom. The added bonus is that, like all quality assessment devices, open-ended questions help you plan your instruction.

Materials You Will Need

- Preplanned open-ended questions
- Observation notebook

Things That Take Effort

Student Portfolios

> *A portfolio is more than just a container full of stuff. It's a systematic and organized collection of evidence used by the teacher and student to monitor growth of the student's knowledge, skills, and attitudes in a specific subject area.*
>
> —L. Vavrus

Background

Teachers use portfolios to assess a student's work over time. As a result, they discover a great deal about how and what students are learning. There are several approaches to portfolio assessment, but all entail at least three vital components: collection, selection, and reflection.

Collection refers to the actual gathering of student work throughout the school year. Representations of both process and product are included so the portfolio contains a full range of a student's abilities.

Since it would be impossible to save everything that a student completes during the year, selection is the second critical ingredient. Teachers and students devise criteria to assist them in selecting which materials should be included in the student portfolio. Such selection criteria are vital to the portfolio process; otherwise, the portfolio becomes an overwhelming heap of papers.

Reflection on the portfolio contents is also necessary. Without it, the entire process becomes quite shallow.

The power of portfolio assessment lies in the patterns and trends uncovered when analyzing the contents at various points in the year. Student interests, attitudes, strengths, and weaknesses can be determined and documented through portfolio assessment.

Did You Know?

- Portfolios are most successful in learner-centered classrooms. Students must be actively involved in portfolio assessment for it to be of value.
- Parents can also be involved in portfolio assessment by documenting their child's literacy activities at home.
- Many teachers keep their own portfolios, containing evidence of their own growth as readers, writers, and professional educators.

#66

Things
That
Take
Effort

Portfolio Contents

Background

Portfolio assessment begins with key questions teachers must ask of themselves and their students. Such questions drive the entire process of portfolio assessment, setting the boundaries of the portfolio. Two key questions deal with contents and purpose: "What kinds of things should we save for the portfolio?" and "What should we do with all of this stuff?"

Did You Know?

- Questions are often more important than answers.
- It is natural for teachers' answers to key questions to change over time; this is a sign of growth in understanding.

Strategy

The portfolio must contain evidence of both student process and student product. Either by grade level or as an entire school, sit down with your colleagues and decide upon some standard pieces that will be placed in every child's portfolio each year. Choose at least three to five items representing process and three to five items representing product. The portfolio contents should reflect the whole student.

Examples of student process include tapes of oral readings, self-assessment sheets, photographs and videos of students in action, drafts that show revision, and interview notes and checklists.

Product measures include logs of books read, written retellings, learning log entries, story maps, photographs of products, videos of student plays, writing samples, lists of published work, and interest inventories.

Every item in the student's portfolio should demonstrate something about that student's development. If you cannot see something different about the student while comparing one piece to another, remove one. Also, it is important to allow the students choice in selecting some of the pieces to remain in their portfolios.

Materials You Will Need

- Portfolio folders for each student

#67

Things
That
Take
Effort

Portfolio-Prompted Planning

Background

You become aware of students' strengths and areas for growth by analyzing the contents of their portfolios. As with any worthwhile assessment venture, the results should point you in the direction of further instructional planning.

Did You Know?

- Portfolios connect separate pieces of student work, thereby giving you a more complete view of the students themselves.
- Portfolio assessment gives students the opportunity to make connections between prior knowledge and new learning.

Strategy

As you become experienced with portfolio assessment, you develop a new way of looking at student work. You see things not for what they are, but for what they reveal about a student's development and what they indicate in terms of needed instruction. As you look at each item, ask yourself (1) What does this show me that the student knows? (2) What does this show me that the student does not know yet? (3) What do I need to do about that?

For example, an accurately completed story map reflects an understanding of story elements—characters, setting, plot, climax, problem, and solution. If several students' maps show misunderstanding of plot, then a mini-lesson with that group of children is in order.

A revised writing sample might show a student's understanding of how to use description as an elaboration strategy. If you see that a student continuously uses only description for elaboration, then further instruction about comparison, hyperbole, exaggeration, and action verbs may be necessary. If, on the other hand, you see that the student uses different types of elaboration in several writing samples, perhaps the student could teach a small group of less successful writers how to use these strategies.

A list of books read in the last semester reveals a student's propensity toward a particular genre and the quantity of a student's reading. You may wish to intervene by suggesting other genres or by setting some minimum requirements for the number of books read in the upcoming weeks.

Analysis of portfolio contents combines powerfully with effective instructional planning.

Materials You Will Need

- Student portfolios

#68

Things That Take Effort

Crate 'Em Up!

Background

Developing a usable system of organizing and maintaining student portfolios is one of the first steps in implementing this type of assessment. Obviously, an effective management system does not ensure quality portfolio assessment, but without such an operative system, it is very hard to successfully use portfolios.

Did You Know?

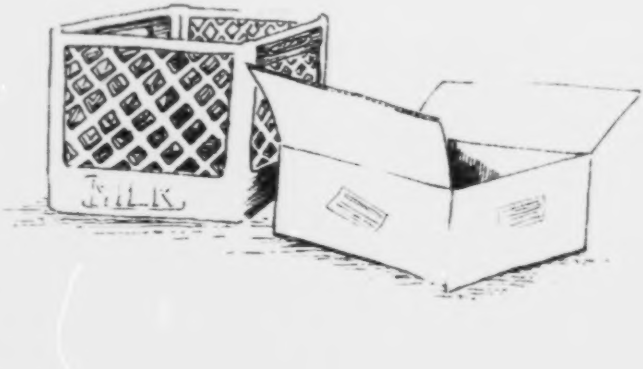
- Students need to have some ownership in the physical format of their portfolios. Most teachers allow children to decorate their portfolios with markers, crayons, pictures, and photographs.
- The physical structure of the portfolio is not nearly as important as the process involved in developing its components.

Strategy

Organize a system for storing portfolios and their items. This can be as simple as having a manila file folder for each student, which can be stored in alphabetical order in a plastic crate of hanging files. If you want a lid, use a cardboard banker's box instead of a plastic crate. A file cabinet also serves this purpose; however, it must be made very clear to the students that they are allowed into this cabinet—since they are often not allowed to touch the teacher's file drawers!

Materials You Will Need

- Manila file folders for each student
- Hanging files
- Plastic crate or cardboard banker's box



#69

Things That Take Effort

Bulky Bundles

Background

In some classrooms, the portfolio contents are not things that can be stored in a flat file folder within a plastic crate. This is the case when students are producing and saving items such as art projects, videotapes, and models of various dimensions. For bulkier portfolios, alternative storage ideas are suggested.

Did You Know?

- Many businesses will give teachers cardboard storage boxes and cartons that can be used for portfolios.
- Portfolios must be accessible to students!

Strategy

Actual artist portfolios, which come in various sizes, are expandable and have flaps that close over the top and tie down. Cardboard tubs—such as large empty ice cream containers—are good to use if your students have many three-dimensional artifacts for their portfolios, such as models and art projects.

For young students who typically include paintings in their portfolios, large "under-the-bed" cardboard boxes designed for storing wrapping paper or sweaters work well. Teachers who use these often stack the boxes at the back of the room.

Regardless of the storage system used, be sure to have the students decorate their portfolios. Also, allow them access to their contents at all times!

Materials You Will Need

- Artist's portfolio, cardboard tubs, or large cardboard "under-the-bed" boxes for each student
- Drawing materials

#70

**Things
That
Take
Effort**

Entry Slips

Background

Allowing children to choose items for their portfolios validates your confidence in their ability to make important decisions. You are also trusting that they will choose items that reflect special things about them as individuals. Portfolio entry slips offer important insight into what the children value and believe you value about their learning. All of these aspects are important as you instruct and evaluate your students.

Did You Know?

- When students have a voice in their classroom, they gradually assume more and more responsibility for their own learning.
- There should be a careful balance between items the students choose for their portfolios and items the teacher chooses.

Strategy

Structure periodic sessions in which class members work with their portfolios concurrently. Tell the students that they will choose an item for their portfolio from their week's work. Guide them through a review of what has been accomplished. Encourage them to look through their desks and daily folders to remind themselves of what they have done. Stress that portfolio items do not have to be finished pieces of work; rather, they are things that tell something about themselves as learners.

Using either large sticky notes or half-sheets of paper that can be stapled to the item, have students write a portfolio entry slip. On this slip of paper, instruct students to briefly describe why each item has been chosen for the portfolio. Without entry slips, students often irrationally "stick" things into their portfolios without much thought, and the whole process becomes diluted. After everyone has completed an entry slip, allow several of the students to share their comments with the group. This gives you a chance to validate appropriately written slips and model how to write improved ones.

Variation

Write questions such as the following on the entry slips: What does this item show about me as a learner? How did I go about creating this item?

Materials You Will Need

- Large sticky notes or half-sheets of paper
- Pencils
- Stapler

#71

Things That Take Effort

Autobiographies of Work

Background

Throughout the school year have students review their entire portfolios and draw conclusions about their learning and improvement. This allows students to see the "big picture" and notice areas of growth that may not be visible on a day-to-day basis. Students step out of the role of creator of the portfolio and become an analyzer. After reviewing all of the portfolio contents, students write an autobiography of the work inside, describing how it has changed over time. This helps students develop an evaluative voice so they become more responsible for their learning and growth.

Did You Know?

- Many schools sponsor student-led conferences in which the students explain their portfolios to their parents at conference time.
- Students as young as kindergartners can look at several pieces of work over time and make some conclusive statements about their growth and learning.

Strategy

At least once during each semester, students should review their entire portfolios and make some conclusive statements. The depth of these statements depends on the maturity level of the students, but all students are capable of self-evaluation.

One way to initiate the Autobiographies of Work process is to have students find a spot in the room to spread out their portfolio contents. After reading each item in the portfolio, have the students organize them into categories (e.g., most successful to least successful), according to their point of view. In reviewing the items, students should consider the following questions:

- Why is this piece better than that one?
- What did I do differently in this piece?
- What is most striking about this piece?
- What can I say about my improvement from my least successful piece to my most successful?
- How have I grown?
- What would I still like to improve on?

Notice how these questions are similar to the ones used to create portfolio entry slips. After guiding students through this process of analyzing and reflecting, ask them to write an autobiography of the work inside the portfolio.

Materials You Will Need

- Student portfolios
- Writing materials

#72

Things That Take Effort

Biographies of Work

Background

In most learner-centered classrooms, it doesn't take long for students to see themselves as a community of learners. Encouragement and praise for each other can often be heard among the students. No one is ostracized for being "behind." When a true community exists in the classroom, peer assessment techniques can be quite valuable.

Did You Know?

- When students collaborate, the level of interaction in the classroom becomes much richer than when the teacher does the majority of the talking.
- With the appropriate structure and modeling, students are usually very honest and straightforward during peer conferences.

Strategy

As an alternative or complement to Autobiographies of Work, use a modified version of this strategy called Biographies of Work. This is the same type of evaluative process—but this time the reviewer is not the author but rather a trusted peer.

Allow each student to choose a partner they trust and respect. Guide the students through the process and questions in Autobiographies of Work, substituting "the author" for "you." For example, you would say, "What did the author do differently in this piece?" or "How has the author grown?" Students look through their partner's work, analyze what they see, and jot down notes.

After the series of prompted questions by the teacher, each student then writes a biography of work for the student with which he or she is paired. This strategy could be used once a semester and can be alternated with Autobiographies of Work.

Materials You Will Need

- Student portfolios
- Writing materials

For the Committed

Exhibitions and Performance Tasks

> *By changing the way we look at assessment, we will transform our classrooms into places where we know that students will experience learning to the fullest and acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to be vital, contributing members of society.*
>
> —Barbara Talbert Jackson

As world-class academic standards continue to become more and more prominent in our twenty-first century schools, so are many nonacademic competencies viewed as necessary for success in the modern workplace. Skills such as creative thinking, decision making, problem solving, learning how to learn, collaboration, and self-management have been defined as "necessary" by the U. S. Department of Labor. It quickly becomes obvious that traditional assessment approaches fall short in their ability to measure such competencies. Teachers need some viable assessment alternatives in which students demonstrate their understanding by doing more than simply "picking the right answer." Performance assessment is one such alternative.

According to Marzano (1993), performance assessment refers to a variety of tasks and situations in which students are given opportunities to demonstrate their understanding and thoughtfully apply knowledge, skills, and attitudes in a variety of contexts. Frequently, these assessments occur over time and result in a tangible product or observable performance. They encourage self-evaluation and revision, require judgment to score, reveal degrees of proficiency based on established criteria, and make public the scoring criteria.

Did You Know?

- Carefully constructed performance tasks give students the opportunity to demonstrate their understanding and apply their skills and knowledge as they would in the world outside of school.
- Consistent with a learner-centered approach to education, performance tasks require students to construct new knowledge, allowing for diverse responses based on individual experience.

#73

For the Committed

Building in Authenticity

Background

Authenticity is one of the hallmarks of performance assessment. Wiggins (1989) defines authenticity as assessment that engages students in applying knowledge and skills in the same way they are used in the real world outside of school. For example, rather than having students list the "ten ingredients to a collaborative relationship," authentic assessment asks students to work together to solve a real-life problem. The teacher then notes which of the ten ingredients the students utilized.

Did You Know?

- While most typical classroom tasks require a single thirty- to sixty-minute class period, authentic performance assessment tasks may take several weeks to complete.
- The principal can become part of the performance task process. The message sent to children is, "We value what you are doing. Your success is important to the entire leadership of this school."

Strategy

To create authentic performance assessment tasks, first identify the standards you wish the assessment to address. Your content standards, often district driven, will include both declarative knowledge (content information) and procedural knowledge (understanding how to do something). For example, a declarative content standard would be the student will understand that the Civil War had many causes. A procedural standard would ask the student to convert measurements in the English system to the metric system.

After determining which standards you are trying to measure, structure the performance task around a complex reasoning processes such as the following:

- comparing
- classifying
- inducing
- deducing
- analyzing
- decision making
- investigating
- problem solving
- constructing support
- experimenting
- inventing

Choose the reasoning process that most closely correlates with your identified standard.

The next step is to draft a performance task. Using the Civil War example from above, the task could focus on constructing support. For example, "Refute or support the claim that slavery was the major cause of the Civil War." If you wanted to focus on comparing, you might use this kind of task: "Discuss three of the causes of the Civil War and determine whether they were related."

Next, build in some information-gathering requirements. Performance assessment is most authentic when it demands students to collect and process information from a multiplicity of sources. We constantly want our students to discriminate among various sources of information, so a statement such as the following is often an important part of this type of assessment: "As you review the causes of the Civil War, keep a list of your sources (people, articles, books, tapes, etc.) and make notes as to their worthiness and usefulness to you. Be prepared to share this information orally." Just as in the real world, where people must weigh the validity of differing opinions and defend their own decisions, students gain practice in this arena as they complete their task.

Finally, decide how students will communicate their performance. Depending on the task itself, students can demonstrate their understandings in a variety of ways. Possibilities include the following:

- written reports
- letters
- articles
- videotapes
- audiotapes
- newscast
- mock interview

- dramatic presentation
- how-to manuals

Offer students a choice of several possibilities for presenting their information.

After writing your final draft of the performance assessment, give it to the students as a natural part of instruction. Along with their assignment, students must have a copy of the criteria you will use to judge their performance. Determine the logistics and scheduling for the students' preparation and presentation. The audience for the presentation may be the whole class, a selected group of students, a team of teachers including the principal, or any combination of the above. Evaluating the performance will involve some judgment on the part of the audience—and self-evaluation on the part of the presenter—but should be done with respect to the preestablished set of criteria. Most helpful in this area are rubrics, discussed in activity 75.

Materials You Will Need

- Materials dependent on performance tasks offered

#74

For the Committed

Anchors and Archetypes

Background

Research on effective lesson design strongly supports the notion of modeling for students. As in all aspects of life, we are much more successful when we know what we are shooting for, and how close our attempt is to the target or standard. Anchors and Archetypes give students successful examples of what they are trying to accomplish.

Did You Know?

- A great way to build up your collection of anchors and archetypes is to save copies of outstanding work from your class to be used with next year's students.
- It is important to periodically compare your anchors with those of other teachers in your grade level to ensure that you are consistent in your expectations for excellence

Strategy

Although anchors and archetypes can be used in any subject area, they work especially well when using holistic scoring for writing. A set of anchor papers contains several compositions that illustrate each level of possible scoring. For instance, using a four-point holistic scale, your anchor set should include at least three 1's, three 2's, three 3's and three 4's. Each paper with a "1" should have received it for different reasons—similarly all the way up. The assumption here is that you have an established set of criteria for what a "1" is, what a "2" is, etc. Use this collection when introducing the writing assignment to students. As you display a transparency of each anchor paper, lead a discussion regarding its score. Children are very good at analyzing anonymous papers!

Anchor papers can be laminated for students to use as they draft and revise their own work. Remind them to read their papers and then read one of the "4's" to make sure theirs meets the criteria. Encourage students to score their own papers before turning them in to you.

Use the anchors to score your students' writing. Also use them to encourage your students to think aloud about their work as they become increasingly aware of what they are or are not doing in their writing. Add to your set of anchors by saving various pieces from your class.

Materials You Will Need

- Transparencies and photocopies of anchor papers
- Student work

#75

For the Committed

Developing a Rubric

Background

As teachers move into more alternative, authentic assessment measures, a single correct answer becomes less and less predominant. As a result, there is a need for some direction in judging student performance. Students exhibit even a well-defined set of criteria to varying degrees. As in a gymnastics meet, where each person uses the same standard—certain moves for the routine—judges score each performer with respect to a shared set of criteria. Both gymnasts and judges know beforehand what constitutes an outstanding backflip versus a mediocre one. This same concept is applicable and necessary in the classroom.

Did You Know?

- "Rubric" comes from the Latin term *rubrica terra*, referring to the use of red earth centuries ago to mark or signify something of importance.
- The rubric used for assessment should be presented to students along with their assignment.

Strategy

A rubric is a vehicle used to guide human judgment, making it less subjective. It is made up of a fixed scale and a list of characteristics that describe performance for each of the points on the scale. Because rubrics describe levels of performance, they provide important information to teachers, parents, and all stakeholders interested in knowing what students can do. For the students, rubrics promote learning by offering clear performance targets for agreed-upon standards.

The number of points on the scale of a rubric can range from three to six. Many experts recommend you use an even number of points so you are not tempted to mark most students "in the middle." This way, you force yourself to decide whether or not the student is above average in performance. If you were to use an odd number of points, for instance five, you might be inclined to mark most of your students as "3's." Usually one level of performance on the rubric is considered acceptable; for example, when using a four-point scale, a "3" or above is often deemed an acceptable performance. The most important factor to keep in mind when creating a rubric is to clearly define and share the criteria for each performance level with students before they even begin their work!

Materials You Will Need

- Prepared rubrics

#76

For the Committed

Exciting Exhibitions

Background

Exhibitions are an extension of performance assessments. As with all performance assessment, *application* of what has been learned is required. An exhibition requires students to combine their learning from various disciplines and from life itself and to demonstrate their understandings to an audience. Teachers create exhibitions by determining what qualities and abilities they value in students and by designing the means with which they can be viewed.

Did You Know?

- Exhibitions give students involvement with real and complex issues—much like they will confront outside of school.
- When students know what is expected, and it is cast in an interesting light, the goal becomes more appealing and attainable.

Strategy

To design an exciting exhibition, first decide what it is you want to see from your students. Move beyond behavioral objectives and reflect on the qualities, attributes and dispositions of successful students. They may include their confidence before a group, their ability to read and compare various sources, or their knack for figuring out a math problem in an original way.

Consider issues pertinent to your students and create challenges for them to wrestle with. In presenting the exhibition assignments, be prepared to show successful examples and explain the scoring criteria that will be used.

Discuss the timeline with the students and clarify whether or not students may work together.

Your exhibitions may be focused on a particular content, but they should demand students to truly integrate their knowledge from many domains of learning.

Materials You Will Need

- Materials dependent on exhibitions planned

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one-story intellects,
two-story intellects, and three-story
intellects with skylights. All fact collectors, who
have no aim beyond their facts, are one-story men. Two-story men
compare, reason, generalize, using the labors of the fact collectors as
well as their own. Three-story men idealize, imagine,
predict—their best illumination comes from
above, through the skylight.

—Oliver Wendell
Holmes

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Laura Lipton

Laura is the director of Educational Consulting Services in New York. She is nationally recognized for her work in professional and organizational development and for her expertise in learner-centered instruction, integrated curricula, and authentic assessment.

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